

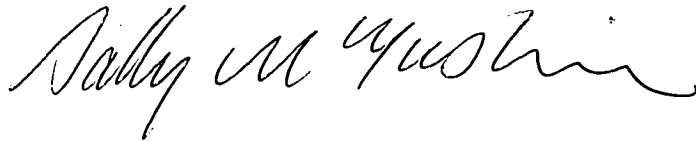
**JAYAPRAKASH NARAYAN, DEMOCRATIC THEORY AND  
PRACTICE**

by

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submitted in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
University of Tasmania  
June 1992

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other higher degree or graduate diploma in any tertiary institution. To the best of this candidate's knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Sally M. Yustine". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the main text block.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

In presenting this thesis I would first like to acknowledge both my supervisor, Dr Philip Eldridge, who has remained a constant guide, and my family who have remained with me throughout.

There are many other people and institutions which have been of assistance to me in the course of my research, especially in India. Firstly, I would like to thank the Jayaprakash Institute of Social Change, Calcutta, which sponsored my time in India. In particular I would like to pay tribute to the late Sugata Dasgupta, a former Director of the Institute, for his initial encouragement. In addition I was helped by the A N Sinha Institute of Social Studies, Patna, especially Dr Sachchidanand, and by the Xavier Institute of Social Service. I am very conscious of the fact that their cooperation greatly facilitated my work in Bihar. The Gandhian Institute in Benares was most supportive too.

Particular thanks must go to all friends associated with the voluntary organisations that I visited for their time, patience, assistance, hospitality and encouragement. These include those specifically mentioned in the dissertation, that is: IMSE, SAREEK, NBJK and those associated with the CYSV in Bodh Gaya and at the National Maidan in Patna. However I also spent time with many other organisations whose time and support were invaluable to my research, and whom I will attempt to name individually: Prayas (Bihar), Sokhodeora Ashram (Bihar), Simultala Ashram (Bihar), Samanvay Ashram (Bihar), Visual Aids for Human Consciousness (West Bengal), the Socio Economic Development Programme (West Bengal), the Centre for

Communication and Cultural Action (West Bengal), Rural Welfare Society (West Bengal), Unnayan (West Bengal), the Historical Institute (Calcutta), the Gandhi Peace Foundation (New Delhi and Calcutta), AVARD (New Delhi), Sarva Seva Sangh (Benares), Rural Communes (Bombay) and Community Aid Abroad (Pune).

There were also many individuals whose advice and opinions I greatly valued, especially Sri Sachchidanandan (Patna), Sharad Kulkarni (Pune) and Comrade M A Rasul from CPI(M) (Calcutta). Geoffrey Ostergaard (University of Birmingham, UK) was most helpful in enabling me to reflect constructively on the time that I had already spent in India and the plan for my return trip. Needless to say I also appreciated the many friendships generated throughout my stay in India, not to mention the companionship and foot slogging endured by my husband Gerry.

At home I have been pleased to know all staff and students, past and present in the department of Political Science. They have all played an important role in my own personal development and the subsequent shaping of my thesis. I must especially thank colleagues with whom I have shared study rooms, seminars and tutoring responsibilities; and particular thanks go to Beth, Jennie, Indra, Rosemary, Liz and especially Beverley who has spent many agonising hours helping me present this dissertation in a legible form.



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## ABBREVIATIONS

AVARD	Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development
BCSS	Bihar Chhatra Sangharsh Samiti (Bihar Student Struggle Committee)
BDO	Block Development Officer
BLD	Bharatiya Lok Dal (National People's Party)
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CFD	Citizens for Democracy
CISRS	Christian Institute for the Study of Religion
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPI(M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CPI(ML)	Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CSP	Congress Socialist Party
CYSV	Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini (Student and Youth Struggle Movement)
DC	District Commissioner
DMK	Dravidia Munnetra Kazhagam (Dravidian People's Party)
EZE	Protestant Central Agency for Development Aid (Germany)
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Scheme

ITT	Indian Institute of Technology
IMSE	Institute for Motivating Self Employment
INTUC	Indian Trade Union Congress
IRDP	Integrated Rural Development Programme
NBJK	Nav Bharat Jagriti Kendra (New Indian Development/Awareness Institute)
PSP	Praja Socialist Party (People's Socialist Party)
RLS	Rashtriya Lok Samiti (National People's Committee)
RCPI	Revolutionary Communist Party of India
RSS	Rashtriya Swayemsevak Sangh (National Voluntary Service Organisation)
SAREEK	Society for the Advancement of Rural Economy, Education and Kultur
SGBK	Sarbik Gram Bikash Kendra (Total Village Development Centre)
XISS	Xavier Institute of Social Service.

## GLOSSARY

<u>Adivasi</u>	aboriginal/tribal
<u>Akali Dal</u>	one of the major moderate Sikh parties; it formed an alliance with the CPI(M) in the 1977 elections.
<u>anchal</u>	a cluster of villages
<u>anganwadi</u>	health workers
<u>antyodaya</u>	uplift of the poorest
<u>ashram</u>	place of abode, generally religious
<u>bandh</u>	strike
<u>Bania</u>	moneylending and land-owning caste in Bihar
<u>bargadar</u>	sharecropper
<u>benami</u>	being nameless or fictitious or fraudulent as with the purchase of land under a false name or land held in another name.
<u>bhadralok</u>	educated Bengali caste class formation of Brahmins, Kayasthas and Vaidyas.
<u>Bharat</u>	India or the nation
<u>Bharatiya</u>	Indian
<u>Bharatiya Lok Dal</u>	name of a political party, meaning National People's Party
<u>bhindi</u>	okra or lady's finger (green vegetable)



<u>bhoodan</u>	voluntary renunciation of land or land gift
<u>Bhumihars</u>	upper caste in Bihar
<u>Brahman</u>	highest and priestly caste
<u>charkha</u>	spinning wheel
<u>chhatra</u>	students
<u>chhatra sangharsh samiti</u>	students' struggle committee
<u>chhatra yuva sangharsh samiti</u>	student and youth struggle committee
<u>chhatra yuva sanghharsh vahini</u>	student and youth struggle movement
<u>chulla</u>	clay stove, usually fuelled by wood
<u>crore</u>	a unit of measure equalling 10,000,000
<u>dacoit</u>	bandit
<u>dan</u>	gift
<u>dharna</u>	a form of non-violent moral pressure used as a political weapon; e.g. a sit in.
<u>Dravidia Munnetra Kazhagam</u>	Dravidian People's Party
<u>gherao</u>	picket or surround
<u>goondas</u>	thugs
<u>gram</u>	village

<u>gramdan</u>	gift of village, that is, transfer of most (ideally all) private land to the village community
<u>gram kosh</u>	village collective fund
<u>gram sabha</u>	village assembly, including all adult residents
<u>Harijan</u>	name given by Gandhiji to ex-untouchable castes
<u>hartal</u>	strike
<u>hatao</u>	get rid of
<u>jagriti</u>	awareness/development
<u>jana</u>	belonging to the people
<u>jana samiti</u>	people's committee or forum
<u>Jana Sangh</u>	name of a political party, meaning People's Party
<u>jana sangharsh samiti</u>	people's struggle committee
<u>jan/a jagaran</u>	people's vigilance organisation
<u>jan/a shakti</u>	people's power
<u>janata</u>	people
<u>Janata Dal</u>	people's party
<u>Jats</u>	backward peasant caste in North India
<u>Kathaks</u>	professional readers
<u>Kayastha</u>	caste of clerks, accountants, professional letter writers etc

<u>kendra</u>	centre
<u>khadi</u>	homespun cloth
<u>kisan</u>	cultivator, peasant or farmer
<u>kisan sabha</u>	peasant front
<u>Koiris</u>	Bihari backward caste
<u>Kshatriyas</u>	warrior caste
<u>Kurmis</u>	Bihari backward caste
<u>lakh</u>	a unit of measure equalling 100,000
<u>lathi</u>	bludgeon
<u>lok</u>	people
<u>lok adlat</u>	people's court
<u>lokniti</u>	politics of the people or people's power
<u>lok sabha</u>	literally means people's council; also it is the name for the lower house of the Indian parliament constituted of directly elected representatives from electoral constituencies in the entire country.
<u>lok samiti</u>	people's committee
<u>Lok Samiti</u>	national organisation of People's Committees
<u>lok sevaks</u>	social workers
<u>lok sevak sangh</u>	organisation of social workers
<u>lok shakti</u>	people's power or force
<u>lok swaraj</u>	people's freedom

<u>Mahant</u>	elected head of temple
<u>mahila</u>	woman
<u>mahila mandal</u>	women's organisation
<u>Mawaris</u>	Bengali term for rich, Hindi-speaking businessmen, meaning from the land of the deserts.
<u>mazdoor</u>	labourer
<u>mazdoor kisan samiti</u>	labourers' and farmers' organisation
<u>mazdoor kisan morcha</u>	labourers' and farmers' movement
<u>mohalla</u>	ward, ie subdivision of a town
<u>nav</u>	new
<u>Nav Bharat Jagriti Kendra</u>	New Indian Development Institution
<u>Naxalite</u>	Maoist revolutionaries
<u>nirman</u>	reconstruction; also used to describe the third stage of <u>gramdan</u>
<u>paise</u>	coin in Indian currency; one hundred paise make one rupee
<u>panchayat</u>	council
<u>panchayat/i raj</u>	village council, denoting a system of village self-government.
<u>pani</u>	water
<u>panidars</u>	waterlords

<u>plattas</u>	small peasants
<u>poorna swaraj</u>	complete independence by truthful and non-violent means
<u>praja</u>	subjects
<u>prapti</u>	receiving; also used to describe the first stage of <u>gramdan</u>
<u>pushti</u>	completion; also used to describe the second stage of <u>gramdan</u>
<u>rajniti</u>	politics of the state or power politics
<u>Rajput</u>	major land-owning caste in Bihar
<u>Rajya Sabha</u>	literally means Council of States; it is the name for the upper house of the Indian parliament.
<u>Rashtriya Swayemsevak Sangh</u>	name of political party, meaning National Voluntary Service Organisation
<u>sabha</u>	council
<u>Sakar</u>	government
<u>samiti</u>	committee or meeting
<u>sampurna kranti</u>	total revolution
<u>sangharsh</u>	struggle
<u>Santiniketan</u>	abode of peace
<u>sarbik</u>	total

<u>sarbik gram bikash kendra</u>	total village development centre
<u>sarva seva sangh</u>	association for the service of all
<u>sarvodaya</u>	uplift of all
<u>sarvodayists</u>	<u>sarvodaya</u> workers
<u>sati</u>	the practice of self-immolation by widows on their husband's funeral pyre
<u>satya</u>	truth
<u>satyagraha</u>	force of truth
<u>satyagrahi</u>	civil resistor
<u>shanti sena</u>	the peace brigade
<u>shramdan</u>	donation of labour
<u>Siksha-satra</u>	centre for education
<u>Sriniketan</u>	abode of beauty and prosperity
<u>sulabh gramdan</u>	<u>gramdan</u> made easy
<u>Swadeshi</u> movement	buy India movement
<u>Swaraj</u>	self-rule; popularly used in the Independence movement
<u>taluka</u>	village area, below a district and above 100,000 people
<u>toofan</u>	whirlwind
<u>udyog parishad</u>	people's initiative committee
<u>Vaidya</u>	Bengali caste of physicians

<u>Vaisya</u>	third <u>varna</u> , commercial caste
<u>varna</u>	ritual status of a caste
<u>Vidhan Parishad</u>	Legislative Council (state level)
<u>Vidhan Sabha</u>	Legislative Assembly (state level)
<u>Visva Bharati</u>	literally means Institution for World Culture; it is the name of the university founded by Rabindranath Tagore.
<u>Yadavas</u>	backward Bihari caste
<u>zamindar</u>	landlord, receiver of rent
<u>zilla</u>	district
<u>zotdars</u>	local power-holders

## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores Jayaprakash Narayan's ideas on democracy as he commuted between constitutional and extra-constitutional politics. It seeks to help establish whether those ideas were merely confused or whether they broke new ground by developing new styles of popular mobilisation that would improve or pave the way for an alternative to the modern state in India. The strengths and weaknesses of his ideas are drawn out from a study of four voluntary organisations and their work in the states of Bihar and West Bengal. These are the Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini (Bodh Gaya); Lok Samiti in conjunction with Nav Bharat Jagriti Kendra (Hazaribagh district); the Institute for Motivating Self Employment (West Bengal and the Santhali Area in Bihar); and the Society for the Advancement of Rural Economy, Education and Kultur (West Bengal).

What becomes apparent is that, while JP basically came to believe in a voluntarist or Gandhian philosophy of participatory democracy, that is loknniti, focusing on the role of the individual in society, his approach was most eclectic. For example he had been attracted to Marxism in his youth and he founded the Congress Socialist Party. In addition, JP always maintained an interest in ideas from many sources and he encouraged community type networking so that community groups could support each other, pooling resources and information in order to maximise any benefits.

Central to JP's ideas were his organisational work to develop the foundation for an alternative political structure and his decision to integrate the "new" voluntarist politics with the "old" constitutional politics, believing that if the



former was to be developed then cognisance had to be taken of the latter. JP's own success was limited, particularly as his ideas came to be identified with the political defeat of the Congress (I), but this was not the essence of his ideas. JP's basic concern was at the grass roots level.

It is this concern that is brought out in the study of the four voluntary organisations, although not all the organisations were directly inspired by JP. The scale of the organisations was very limited and no clear cut goal emerged but the general theme was with self-reliant people's movements as agents of transformation towards improving or changing the polity. All of them recognised the need for a balance between popular mobilisation and economic development, although the CYSV did not regard that as its role.

The strategies employed by the organisations were effective in improving the bargaining position of the poor and the development of independent resources and capabilities at the local level. However, they have not been able to formulate any definite mode of popular representation and participation. Nevertheless, a systematic understanding of the extra-constitutional operation of these four organisations gives further insight into JP's ideas and his attempts to launch a "total revolution" in Indian democracy by developing new styles of popular mobilisation.

## INTRODUCTION

Basically this thesis is concerned with Jayaprakash Narayan's exploration of the tensions between his idea of lokniti (or people's power), that is essentially a very direct form of democracy, and rajniti (or state/power politics), which he saw as manifested in the form of representative or party democracy. Jayaprakash Narayan, popularly known as JP, wanted to move away from rajniti, and the constitutional framework that supported it, towards lokniti, which essentially he thought operated outside the current constitution of independent India. At the same time he hoped to simultaneously develop and strengthen lokniti. This was not a straight forward path, and involved many tensions and contradictions as he sought to operate within both spheres, presenting a very confused model. This thesis will look at the implications of his ideas: whether they were simply mixed up or whether they presented the groundwork for new styles of popular mobilisation that could at least modify the modern state in India, if not develop an alternative.

Firstly this will be done by looking at Gandhi and the concept of voluntarism as a means of achieving lokniti in the Indian political situation in contrast with the constitutional democracy that independent India has pursued, and the communist challenges it has faced. Then the evolution of JP's ideas and the extent to which they manifested themselves in the workings of a number of voluntary social action groups that have operated in Bihar and West Bengal will be examined.

JP was not satisfied with the Indian state. His discontent stemmed from what he described as its rajniti character as he believed its centralised decision making processes left the bulk of the population increasingly powerless. In particular he was concerned with the party political nature of government and its emphasis on personal leadership. He maintained that democratic values were being steadily eroded by this trend, which was characterised by a lack of impartiality and dedication to duty and efficiency by the bureaucracy and general galloping political corruption. He charged that those at the centre were concerned with their own personal gain at the expense of the mass of the ordinary people. So far as they purported to put forward welfare schemes and development programmes for the benefit of the impoverished masses he held that these plans:

remain either unexecuted or mal-executed, leaving comparatively little of lasting value or use. The so called state "core" sector becomes a bottomless pit from which little is retrieved as compared with the vast amounts sunk in them. Land reforms and other similar reforms remain infructuous, and even land specifically reserved for the landless is grabbed by powerful politicians and officers and their relatives. Controls fail and the black market flourishes.<sup>1</sup>

JP saw the solution in lokniti. This did not represent any single ideology, but it was essentially a concept of decentralisation, based on the premise that people, could by their own actions change and better their situations while having due consideration to the welfare of all. Thus JP believed that ordinary citizens had a role to play, but he realised that this required their learning to stand on their own, rather than being used by political parties.

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<sup>1</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "First Things First," Everyman's, July 28, 1973. Reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol.4: Total Revolution, ed. Brahmanand (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1978), p.15.

In order to understand JP's views and the concepts of rajniti and lokniti one needs to comprehend the overall political scene in which he worked. This is not easy as there are many forces operating at the one time, like a web of variegated tissues interwoven so that the polity cannot be simply compartmentalised with different aspects treated in isolation. It is as Morris-Jones suggested, rather like a cat playing with the stage curtains.<sup>2</sup> The cat is seen by the audience but not the actors, who may detect the audience's distraction but not understand it. Just to further complicate matters, the hero's make-up may start to come apart, giving the cast cause for concern while the audience are quite unaware of this situation.<sup>3</sup>

Morris-Jones identified three distinct idioms in which political life in India is conducted. They are modern, traditional and saintly. These languages of politics are useful in describing the different forces at work on the Indian political scene. The modern language or idiom refers to the political institutions of the nation state, that is the political system adopted at independence, including: the constitution, parliament, the Indian Civil Service, political parties, centre and state governments, the Prime Minister and the Chief Ministers. It refers also to the operation of modern politics such as parliamentary debates, party politics and party politicking generally.

Morris Jones saw the traditional idiom largely along caste lines: varna and jati. However this does not mean that it represents a simple social hierarchy. There are many variables acting within a single village, and of course from village to village, region to region, such as religious factors and land-ownership patterns. Some elements within the traditional idiom have been strengthened by modern

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<sup>2</sup> W H Morris-Jones, The Government and Politics of India (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1971), p.55.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid..

politics, for example some castes have found that they have been able to use this traditional grouping to advance their social, political and economic positions. At the same time, some traditional elements have been undermined - in particular the self supporting nature of village life which provided both a social and economic role for everybody, largely independent of outside forces.

Third is saintly politics, that is Gandhi's legacy of satyagraha and the search for truth. Morris-Jones described this as a grass roots, bare foot type of politics based on individual self-restraint and responsibility serving as a conscience on the wider political spheres - a language of comment rather than practical; widespread action. He maintained that Vinoba Bhave exemplified the saintly idiom but he also mentioned JP in this category.<sup>4</sup> At the time of his writing, this emphasis on Vinoba represented the play at that stage. However from the early 1970s, the ideas of Jayaprakash Narayan gained importance and momentum renewing the relevance of the Gandhian legacy beyond that which Morris-Jones seemed to accord it, developing a much broader idiom than Vinoba espoused, and much more interwoven with the other idioms. This is significant because Morris-Jones thought the language of saintly politics is to be found "at the margin" of Indian politics, "spoken only by a few and occupying a definitely subsidiary place on the political page."<sup>5</sup> Yet he acknowledged it had an effect on the whole political field. However the JP movement challenged this limited role suggesting much greater scope. For this reason the phrase "voluntarist idiom" or "voluntarist politics" will be favoured rather than "saintly idiom". Its connotations are less romantic and more accurately approximate the political style envisaged by JP.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp.59-61.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.59.

Voluntarism as understood by JP is basically a belief in liberty and equality and an understanding that this can be achieved largely through voluntary efforts, without the use of state power, representing a move towards self-government, lokniti or people's power rather than government by others, amounting to rajniti. It is essentially a theory of decentralisation based on a confidence in the essential goodness of human nature, emphasising a local self-sufficiency either of individuals or communities, with social and economic equals acting together in voluntary cooperation. Moreover JP's approach involved a moral commitment not to rule or deceive others. It was based on the exercise of free will by the individual requiring a consciousness based on self-restraint and mutual cooperation. However, to achieve this good will inevitably involves a struggle against any prevailing centralist or authoritarian powers which can be seen as representing rajniti. Such centralist powers have been supported by the modern idiom as well as some aspects of the traditional one. JP wanted to raze rajniti. He wanted to raze it down towards lokniti, which he saw along the lines of a people's politics in the saintly or voluntarist idiom, based on voluntary cooperation for mutual benefit. Nevertheless he recognised that this would require an integrating process combining parliamentary politics with the voluntarist idiom, and as such power would only gradually be devolved from the centre.

JP saw these ideas as requiring the organisation and education of organs of struggle, that is, struggle against those forces that frustrate people's participation in decision making. However, the organs of struggle were not simply to be negative forces undermining the prevailing structure. They were to provide first-hand experience in lokniti which meant decentralised politics, economic and social justice. Thus, he saw the organisations working at two levels; undertaking constructive work to extend lokniti; and political activist work aimed at undermining rajniti. He thought that both dimensions of action

needed to develop simultaneously and that a balance needed to be struck between the two.

It will be argued that the importance of JP's ideas have been demonstrated by the emergence of an increasing number of voluntary organisations concerned with direct social action amongst the poorest elements, for whom modernisation provided little role other than "ritualistic" voting, and serving as cheap labour and targets of new forms of social oppression in their villages.<sup>6</sup> The organisations that have been studied here viewed development as a struggle, and were aware of a need to change the prevailing power structures, and like JP they looked outside modern politics as the place for action. They emphasised mobilisation and organisation and were concerned with transforming power structures and raising political consciousness. As voluntary organisations they worked outside the party structure, were flexible in approach and not constricted by any narrow logic of capturing state power. They aimed to decentralise economic and political power, and work with people rather than for them, viewing them not in any instrumental sense but rather as an integral part of the social and cultural transformations that were seen as necessary to fight state power and political repression.<sup>7</sup> There was increasing interaction between such groups as they worked amongst the poorest sections of the community, committed to the empowerment of people, raising political consciousness and establishing people's organisations for direct action. Thus they took up immediate issues of oppression and exploitation, raising awareness about the exploitative and oppressive nature of the prevailing structures at both the micro and macro-levels.

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<sup>6</sup> This is illustrated by the work of the Lokayan Institute based at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi. Lokayan is engaged in identifying and engaging in dialogue with action groups.

<sup>7</sup> cf. D L Sheth, "Grass Roots Stirrings and the Future of Politics", *Alternatives*, IX (1983): 21.

JP's philosophy will be examined firstly in the context of his own ideas and actions, and secondly, through its expression in the ideas and work of selected voluntary action type organisations.

The methodology employed in researching this thesis has included both secondary materials and empirical work. The empirical work involved a six months field trip to India during which time I was attached to the Jayaprakash Institute of Social Studies, Calcutta. I also worked from

The A N Sinha Institute, Patna

Xavier Institute of Social Services, Ranchi

The Gandhian Institute of Studies, Varanasi,

AVARD and the Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi.

JP's ideas are supported by his own writings as well as various written commentaries. In addition, as JP was a contemporary figure there are many people with whom he worked or was associated, and some of them were able to comment both on JP's character and their respective interpretations of his ideas, as well as their views on the same. These include particularly JP's former secretary, Sri Sachchidanand, other sarvodayists, Vahini members, and people associated with AVARD and the JP and Gandhian Institutes.

Two of the organisations studied were identified from JP's own work: that is, Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini and Lok Samiti. The other two organisations, based in West Bengal, were IMSE and SAREEK. They were selected quite independently of JP but were chosen because they exhibited many parallels in their ideas, and they had been identified by the Jayaprakash Institute as organisations undertaking new political type initiatives. The study of these



organisations has included some written materials such as their own reports and publications as well as two evaluations from the JP Institute on IMSE and SAREEK. Further, the Vahini's work in Bodh Gaya attracted publicity and has been reported in a number of different sources. I engaged in dialogue with leaders and cadres of the organisations, and held meetings with groups of people involved in the organisations' work. The discussions took the form of both structured and unstructured interviews, and were conducted in both city offices and in the villages where they were working. The main aim was to obtain perceptions of the organisations in their local environments. Specific topics included philosophy, structure and participation, target groups, community responses, role of cadres, types of programmes adopted, types of conflict confronted, awareness-raising processes, and relationships with other voluntary associations and with government organs. Generally these were discussed in the context of the situations faced by those organisations. I also sought observations on the organisations from people outside them but closely associated with the voluntary sector.

The main themes that emerge throughout the study are: the wholeness of the approach required to fulfill JP type ideas; the need to educate and organise people towards their own empowerment through popular participation and decentralisation; and the tensions involved in seeking to balance the concepts of developing lokniti against the prevailing rajniti. Yet, as is clear from Morris-Jones' explanations of the idioms, the issues between the two ideas cannot be treated as a total polarisation. Many variables need to be considered.

The first chapter examines the idea of lokniti as a process of the voluntarist idiom and the operation of rajniti in the modern idiom, looking at the possibility of extending the margin of voluntarist politics from Morris-Jones' description

as a language of comment to one of practical behaviour. It looks especially at the ideas of Gandhi. Then it examines the direction that modern politics has taken and the challenges that this has thrown up, in particular the emergence of the Naxalites, who presented a Maoist idiom. Finally the chapter returns to the voluntarist idiom to discuss what it potentially has to offer the modern idiom as a way to help meet its shortcomings.

The second chapter concentrates on the evolution of JP's ideas, tracing his activities from the time when he was a student in the US, to his return to India and his involvement in the Congress Socialist Party, his involvement with bhoodan and his leadership of the Bihar movement. However, it is not just a simple chronology as JP's interests were always very wide. He was concerned with the wholeness of society, and with educating and organising it from that angle. From this, his concept of "total revolution" can be drawn and understood.

Chapter Three deals with the difficulties and contradictions in actually applying JP's ideas to the modern polity, particularly the inability of the Janata party to achieve any major transformation through rajniti, emphasising the need to go beyond institutionalised politics. This experience throws light on tensions between the role of parties and movements.

The fourth Chapter is a background chapter on Bihar and West Bengal, the areas in which the second part of the study is focussed. JP had been active in Bihar. The neighbouring state of West Bengal provides a useful contrast, especially in view of the fact that they are both volatile states. However, West Bengal has quite a different political tradition with Marxism apparently representing a dominant force. Even so elements of JP's thought find parallels

in the ideas of Tagore and M.N.Roy This chapter sets the scene for the environment in which the organisations which are studied work, in particular, the rajniti forces against which they struggle.

Chapter Five introduces the organisations: Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini, CYSV, a JP initiated youth movement; Nav Bharat Jagriti Kendra, NBJK, in association with Lok Samiti, which was also a JP initiated organisation, which aimed to establish a decentralised structure from the village upwards; the Institute for Motivating Self Employment, IMSE, which had Marxist origins; and the Society for the Advancement of Rural Economy, Education and Kultur, SAREEK, an organisation which grew out of a disillusionment with the parliamentary political process' ability to bring about any real social change.

The structure of these organisations is examined in Chapter Six, looking at their basic mechanics, in particular the scope for democratic participation within their operations and their subsequent ability to educate and organise people towards their own empowerment.

The seventh chapter deals with the constructive work undertaken, that is, the programmes of immediate action that seek to deal with people's situations in their totality looking at basic needs such as health, education and productivity, presenting a holistic approach. It outlines the basis of grass roots organisational structures moving towards some degree of self-government. This is mainly a focus on local work, including local struggle programmes that seek to devolve power at that level.

The macro level is studied in Chapter Eight, concentrating on the organisations' interaction with the larger political structure, particularly elections and the party process, an awareness of and participation in government programmes, struggle against injustices within the modern state structure such as corruption and bureaucratic inertia. It emphasises rajniti/lokniti tensions.

Chapter Nine draws out the links between JP and the work of the voluntary organisations, in the context in which they have occurred. It looks at both JP's and the voluntary organisations' respective ideologies and the ways that they have sought to fulfil them, especially the use of trained motivators, organisational structures, networking, constructive programmes, methods of funding and demands that they have placed on government. It also looks at the problems that these approaches have presented in terms of meeting their goals. This presents many variables, and the continuous nature of the process is drawn out.

The conclusion that is drawn out from this analysis does not attempt to evaluate the work of the voluntary organisations, rather it seeks to establish a convergence of their ideas with those of JP, demonstrating the relevance of JP's ideas to India's political situation in an immediate, practical and continuing sense. The scenario is generally local, but it is a continually evolving one in which people have been increasingly encouraged to view themselves as the means of their own social transformation rather than being reliant on the State. From this standpoint, while the State would still play an important role, it is conceived as only a partial means to further people's larger transformation. On the one hand they can draw on its financial resources; and on the other, they can struggle to resist any repressive measures it might employ to hinder popular

movements. So although there is no blueprint for an alternative form of politics, JP's ideas represent the exploration of possibilities for the foundation of a grass roots approach, largely independent from government, yet providing strength to the government's democratic nature.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE RELEVANCE OF GANDHI'S VOLUNTARIST STYLE OF POLITICS

#### I. INTRODUCTION

As the leader of the independence movement Gandhi, had believed that voluntarism should have been the basis of the independent Indian polity. One of his supporters, Agarwal, went so far as to draw up a voluntarist-style constitution.<sup>1</sup> Strictly speaking the voluntarist idiom in its truest form would not have a constitution but at the time of independence it was impractical to think that the British would hand over political power without any form of written guidelines. This chapter looks at Gandhi's ideas, and Agarwal's interpretation of the same. Then it looks at the actual political path that independent India took, that is modern idiom; and it looks at the rajniti type scenario that this has presented and its shortcomings in terms of its aim to achieve democracy. The operation of modern politics should not be understood simply as a constitutional outline. It was superimposed on the traditional idiom. Furthermore it sought to absorb elements of a communist style idiom that was seen to represent a threat to the stability of the modern order. This presented problems amongst the communists, leading to the emergence of the Naxalites who sought to present their own Maoist based idiom. The Naxalites were not able to maintain themselves but they served to further highlight the inadequacies of the modern political power structures to present a democratic model, and the relevance of the voluntarist idiom to the Indian situation. Reference is also made here to M N Roy who had also come from a communist

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<sup>1</sup> Shriman Narayan Agarwal, Gandhian Constitution for Free India, (Allahabad: Kitabistan, 1946), Gandhi wrote the foreword.

background, and later moved to a voluntarist position in the Indian context. Thus this chapter seeks to review the relevance of Gandhian type ideas and the democratic potential they offered the Indian polity. It is not a straightforward case and it may be useful to remember Morris Jones' cat playing with the stage curtains distracting the audience, that is a play within a play.

## II. GANDHI

Central to Gandhi's beliefs was the need to struggle for a "non-violent democracy, otherwise spelt true education of all. The rich should be taught the doctrine of stewardship and the poor that of self-help".<sup>2</sup> In other words what was required was a moral commitment by all towards lok niti type ideals of social, political and economic equality free from both exploitation of others and dependence on others.

Gandhi was a practical idealist and a deeply religious man who was concerned with the suppressed and oppressed sections of humanity, hoping for a world free from exploitation and injustice. Gandhi never claimed any rigid structure or application and was not deeply involved with theoretical considerations of Marxism or any other concepts, nor did he express himself in scientific or economic terminology. He foresaw no inevitable utopia for he believed societies would evolve continually with experiences of life through trial and error. Jayaprakash Narayan built on and gave a new, often controversial direction to Gandhi's ideas, mixing them with elements of Western democratic, and Marxist thought.

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<sup>2</sup> M K Gandhi, 4.6.1940, published in The Harijan, 8.6.1940. Reprinted in Gandhi, The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, vol. LXXII (Ahmedabad: The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Government of India, 1963), p.36.

Gandhi's philosophy was based on satyagraha, that is, force of truth, and he saw life as a continuing search for truth. He saw truth as God but because of the imperfections and limitations of mankind, Gandhi believed that what was important was the integrity of one's own conscience maintaining that it was mind not matter that was the basis of social progress. He stressed the role of the individual in bringing about his particular vision of revolution for he saw satyagraha as a way of life based entirely on individual moral responsibility representing the fundamental everlasting means of social transformation. Gandhi wanted a continual transformation, not one absolute revolution that would occur at a certain time and place. Satyagraha was not simply a means towards the end of capturing power. It was both means and ends, a continuing process based on non-violence. Gandhi did not believe that violence would bring about revolutionary change. Rather, he thought violence simply begets violence so that if a rule is established through violence it inevitably sets up a violent regime.

Central to satyagraha was Gandhi's idea of a constructive programme, "otherwise and more fittingly . . . called construction of poorna swaraj or complete independence by truthful and non-violent means".<sup>3</sup> He developed the constructive programme after being confronted with the impoverished bonded labourers in Champaran, Bihar. These were no longer self-reliant independent peasants. They were dependent on the success or failure of their cash crops, indigo, and if the crop or market failed then they were dependent on the goodwill of their respective landlords who dictated that they grow indigo in the first place. Gandhi's constructive programme aimed to overcome this type of situation. It involved the slow construction of an infrastructure for a just society through cooperative effort. Gandhi never offered an exhaustive

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<sup>3</sup> M K Gandhi, "Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place", 13.12.1941, Gandhi, Collected Works, vol. LXXV, p.146.



constructive programme. He believed that this was something that had to be determined according to the situation. He was a very practical person who sought workable solutions. Some elements that he regarded as important on the immediate Indian scene were: communal unity, the removal of untouchability, village sanitation, education in health and hygiene, adult education and basic education of a kind appropriate for village life.

The constructive programme came to be symbolised by khadi and the charka, that is homespun cloth and the spinning wheel. Gandhi maintained that: "Khadi mentally means decentralisation of the production and distribution of the necessities of life".<sup>4</sup> The concept presented a challenge and an alternative to the importation of ready-made cloth which had meant a drain of resources from the villages. It was a drain that reverberated throughout the community. The spinners and weavers were adversely affected. Gandhi's promotion of khadi was politically, economically and socially significant. It was political in that it provided a strategy to fight the commercial power of the British Raj; it was social in providing dignity to individuals who were thus transformed from being beggars to wage earners. More than that, khadi represented a change in outlook and the whole way of life based on moral values of self-limitation, that is, limiting oneself to one's consumption needs rather than being motivated by profit and greed. Thus men and women would live freely and be prepared to face the whole world with no-one living indolently or luxuriously. This was the essence of the spinning wheel. It is also the essence of voluntarism. Gandhi applied this argument to industry generally for he appreciated the evils of exploitation by the competitive capitalist economy based on large scale industry. So he suggested a decentralised economy based on village self-sufficiency and self-limitation. Gandhi believed that economic equality was the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.150.

"master key to independence". He continued by explaining that economic equality:

means the levelling down of the few rich in whose hands is concentrated the bulk of the nation's wealth on the one hand, and the levelling up of the semi-starved naked millions on the other. A non-violent system of government is clearly an impossibility so long as the wide gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persists.<sup>5</sup>

Gandhi believed that self-limitation and self-control applied to all aspects of life. Consequently he decried the adverse effects of the centralised Western legal system for he believed that the authority they exercised perpetuated Western colonialism, and thus hindered the development of lok niti, that is, people's power. He argued that if people were prepared to resolve their own disputes then they would not need to resort to third parties and could move instead towards lok niti, which emphasises the role, rights and responsibilities of the individual.<sup>6</sup>

However, to achieve lok niti it would be necessary to develop a decentralised political structure which enabled the weakest to have the same opportunity as the strongest. Gandhi had in mind as direct a form of democracy as could be achieved. He felt this entailed decentralised, self-sufficient communities based on mutual dependence of the members within those respective communities.<sup>7</sup> He saw each individual as being conscious of his own responsibilities for himself and towards the community. Gandhi attributed little importance to any state structure for his methodology was not based on the capture or destruction of the state. Rather Gandhi wanted a mass moral and peaceful social revolution which he thought could be achieved by a change in individual's hearts. Non-

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 158.

<sup>6</sup> cf Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, 1910, Reprinted in Gandhi, The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, vol. X, pp.6 - 68.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p.10.

violent civil disobedience was developed as a strategy to help achieve this. Nevertheless he gave priority to constructive work, warning that the role of civil disobedience was limited. For example he held that civil disobedience could not be directed for a general cause such as independence. The issue had to be definite and capable of being clearly understood and within the power of the opponent to yield for the purpose of redressing a specific local wrong.<sup>8</sup>

Gandhi did not foresee any inevitable utopia, and he never committed himself to any details. He was wary of long term planning stating: "For me, I say with Cardinal Newman: 'I do not seek the distant scene; one step enough for me'".<sup>9</sup> However, he sympathised with the constitutional framework drawn up by Shriman Narayan Agarwal who tried to base his work in Gandhi's writings.<sup>10</sup> This framework laid out the fundamental rights such as freedom of speech, assembly, conscience, basic education, as well as fundamental duties of the individual such as avoiding and checking, if necessary, exploitation of man by man.

The village was seen as the central unit in Agarwal's proposed political structure. It was to be governed by a panchayat that was elected every three years on the basis of full adult suffrage. The panchayat functions were to include education, recreation, security, agriculture, industry, trade and commerce, sanitation, medical relief and courts administering speedy civil and criminal justice. This involved running schools, maintaining an educative library, encouraging sports and games, arranging exhibitions and fairs,

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<sup>8</sup> Gandhi, "Constructive Programme", p. 165.

<sup>9</sup> Gandhi, Young India, 24.12.1920, reprinted in Gandhi, Collected Works, vol. XIX, pp.173 - 174.

<sup>10</sup> Shriman Narayan Agarwal, Gandhian Constitution for Free India, (Allahabad: Kitabistan, 1946), Gandhi wrote the foreword.

promoting cooperative farming, discouraging commercial crops, organising village industries on cooperative lines and ensuring healthy drinking water.

In addition Agarwal's scheme provided for taluka panchayats, district panchayats (or ward panchayats and municipal councils at the urban level), provincial government and central government. Elections to the higher levels of government were to be indirect. The President of each lower level was his or her panchayat's representative at the next level. This process continued to the central government so that all representatives on the central government were also presidents of their local village panchayat, a factor which Agarwal regarded as most important for decentralised government ensuring the representatives' familiarity with day-to-day reality in the village.<sup>11</sup> Later, independent India sought to take up these ideas from the district to village levels under the panchayati raj system. The role of the higher levels of government tended to be more supervisory and coordinating, although there were a number of specifically national tasks accorded to the central government such as managing all India departments of transport and communications, regulating currency, customs and international trade. Agarwal prepared his draft constitutional guidelines at a time when there were many attempts to develop an Indian constitution. His decentralised structure provided for a form of limited representative democracy that would ensure a high degree of people's participation. Nevertheless he did not emphasise consensus in decision making and consensus would have required a very deliberate effort on the part of everyone to contribute towards decision making, thus maximising participation.

Agarwal's decentralised structure accepted the inevitability of some form of constitutional government at that time, but it sought to minimise its effects, allowing for greater participation and voluntary effort.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p.102.

### III INDIA'S CONSTITUTIONAL PATH

Gandhi had advocated the dissolution of the Congress after independence, rather than have it transform itself into a political party. However most of the Congress leaders maintained that:

India requires for its gradual and orderly political, social and economic all round progress, one big political party, large enough to guarantee a stable government, and strong enough organisationally to maintain its hold and influence over the people.<sup>12</sup>

Gandhi's ideas were not regarded as a serious alternative by either the British or most of the Western educated Congress leadership. Basically they saw Western parliamentary democracy as the only option, that is a constitutionally defined parliamentary democracy. However they recognised communism as a possible threat. This was the beginning of the Cold War period. Moreover it was the time of the communist success in China, and the consequent founding of the People's Republic of China under Mao Tse-Tung. Many parallels could be drawn between the development of the Indian National Congress and the Chinese Communist Party in their respective struggles for independence. However the Congress, under Nehru, opted for a Western style parliamentary democracy and India came to be seen as the bastion of democracy in Asia.

Meanwhile Gandhi's ideas were not afforded much credibility in terms of the constitutional path which India chose to pursue. India's first Prime Minister, Nehru, described the villages, where the mass of the Indian population lived, as "just a collection of mud huts and individuals".<sup>13</sup> He saw villages as old

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<sup>12</sup> This statement appeared in the All India Congress Bulletin, 7.11.1947, and is cited in G Austin, The Indian Constitution Cornerstone of a Nation (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1972), p.29.

fashioned and backward, not as a way forward, and he could not understand Gandhi's ideas as to:

why a village should necessarily embody truth and non-violence. A village normally speaking is backward intellectually and culturally and no progress can be made from a backward environment. Narrow minded people are much more likely to be untruthful and violent.<sup>14</sup>

He spoke of the need to speedily obtain material objectives through the modernisation process, and wanted to "encourage the village to approximate more to the culture of the town".<sup>15</sup> Generally the Independence leaders believed that the tasks of governing such a large population with its geographical and social complexities and economic disparities required a strong, central political authority.

Thus the constitution laid out a republican, secular and federal parliamentary form of democracy with a strong central government that controlled the major sources of government finance. In addition it enjoyed such powers as Article 356 of the Constitution. This enabled it to institute Presidential Rule in the states thereby suspending respective state legislatures, bringing them under the control of the Centre. The constitutional wording was very vague giving wide scope for central interference.<sup>16</sup> Structurally the Union government consisted of the President and two houses, the Lok Sabha (People's House) and the Rajya Sabha (Council of States). Constituencies were divided into roughly

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<sup>13</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, The Discovery of India (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1965), p.523.

<sup>14</sup> J Nehru, 9.10.1945, A Bunch of Old Letters (London: Asia Publishing House, 1960), p.508.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p.509.

<sup>16</sup> This statement appeared in the All India Congress Bulletin, 7.11.1947, cited in Austin, Cornerstone of a Nation, p.29.

equal size population-wise and were elected on the basis of five year terms. The upper house members were mainly elected by their respective state assemblies. Some members could be appointed by the President. Whilst the upper house had the right to be fully informed by the Government's activities, it could not raise a censure motion. Parliament was not a deliberative policy making body although it could modify legislation. Decision making was concentrated with the Prime Minister, Cabinet and high levels of bureaucracy. The Prime Minister and Ministers were a part of parliament, and are appointed by the President. In practice, the Prime Minister was the leader of the majority party in the Lok Sabha, and the Ministers were selected by the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister also chaired the Planning Commission, an extra-constitutional advisory body empowered to draw up plans for the country's development but not accountable to Parliament. Nevertheless, the Planning Commission had no executive powers, and had to work through the Ministries and Prime Minister's department.

The state level government was similar in organisation and structure to the Union government. It had a governor who was appointed by the President, the Legislative Assembly (Vidhan Sabha) and some states had an upper house or Legislative Council (Vidhan Parishad). The Chief Minister was the leader of the majority party or coalition in the lower house. The state government undertook its administration largely through the levels of local government, that is the village panchayat, the Development Block (about 100 panchayats) and the District (covering several blocks).

The judicial system was integrated and centralised extending from the subordinate and district courts to the State High Courts, with the Supreme Court at the centre with original and exclusive jurisdiction in any case relating to the Constitution. The Judges were appointed by the President in consultation

with the Chief Justice, other Judges, and if necessary the State High Courts. The Chief Justice was chosen by the President on the advice of the Prime Minister.

So although it was universal adult suffrage, the political system was centralised to such an extent that participation in decision making by people generally was minimal. Indeed the Constitution afforded the basic responsibility for governing to the State, that is, the Centre. The extent of the State policy was enumerated in Part IV of the Constitution. These principles were not enforceable by any court but nevertheless were held out to be "fundamental in the governance of the country".<sup>17</sup> The basic direction was laid down in Article 38:

The State shall strive to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting as effectively as it may a social order in which justice - social, economic and political - shall inform all the institutions of national life.

The State was entrusted the major responsibility for raising the masses by ensuring social and economic justice. So it is understandable why government powers were so centralised for if social and economic progress were to emanate from the State, then the State had to have the means of social and economic control. To the extent that the central government took this responsibility, direct participation by people was limited. Their participation was indirect, and in the Indian situation basically this took the form of universal adult franchise. So theoretically there was scope for the adult population to play a role in decision making even if it was simply to give assent or register dissent to the manner in which they were being governed. In addition to a high rate of illiteracy<sup>18</sup> and general lack of education, which made for a limited outlook,

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<sup>17</sup> Article 37.



their political experience was that of colonialism, princes, the caste system and feudal landlords, so that there was always someone with higher authority to be responsible for decision making. The Indian constitution perpetuated this situation by assuming this role, albeit with the ostensible consent of the people.

The theory was that the Indian Constitution would nurture people to the extent that they could take on that responsibility. However, the centralised Indian system afforded two major weaknesses: firstly, it was more likely that abuses of power could occur; and, secondly, that participation would be simply "ritualistic" so that effective devolution of power by the centre and simultaneous assumption of responsibility by people would be hindered. On the other hand the underlying concern of the Indian constitution was with achieving order and national unity under a democratic system. It imposed the maintenance of democratic rights as an obligation on the part of the government, detailed in Part III of the constitution. The Fundamental Rights included rights to equality, to freedom against exploitation, to cultural and educational rights, to property, and to constitutional remedies ensuring the enforcement of these rights. These rights were held to be so fundamental that they were declared to be in force immediately, even before the commencement of the Constitution. Consequently, all existing laws that were inconsistent with Part III were declared to be invalid in so far as they were inconsistent. However, the Centre sought to circumvent these rights and further centralise its power. For example, the 25th Amendment to the Constitution, 1971, restricted the constitutionally entrenched fundamental right to property. Such steps implied that the Central Parliament was omnipotent and could alter the constitution to suit its own ends.

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<sup>18</sup> The 1951 census recorded 16.67% adult literacy. Research and Reference Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, India 1987 (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1988), p.72.

Together the Fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles were seen as "the Conscience of the Constitution"<sup>19</sup> because they were to pave the constitutional path to social revolution, with the Constitution serving as an instrument for social change. The theory was that it would nurture people to the extent that they could take on that responsibility. One of the most important means was seeking to ensure social and economic justice. The State was to secure a social order for the promotion of the people's welfare, undertaking duties such as raising nutrition levels and standards of living. The Directive Principles served to uphold the virtues of the Constitution. Also it gave credibility to government policy and party platforms apparently made in pursuance of the aims of the Directive Principles.

The parliamentary system largely reinforced the traditional political idiom of land ownership and patterns of caste dominance in rural areas, establishing a series of patron-client relationships with the parliamentary parties at the apex. The government effectively established channels for rewards to the power holders who secured the largest vote blocs. For example, the government invested very heavily in the Green Revolution building up an infrastructure including irrigation, roads, electricity, credit facilities and the distribution of new seeds. It has been claimed that the rich farmers, with twenty acres or more, benefited the most from the Green Revolution, while the vast majority suffered a "relative decline in their economic position."<sup>20</sup> The "top down" planning bias did not take local situations into account, nor did it involve local populations in their own development. Even when certain rights were vested through legislation, dominant groups were able to neutralise these because of their monopoly over power through their ownership of land, credit and other

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<sup>19</sup> G Austin, The Indian Constitution Cornerstone of a Nation (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1972), p.50.

<sup>20</sup> F Frankel, India's Green Revolution, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p.12.

economic resources. Thus, according to such accounts, the parliamentary system did not fulfil Nehru's vision of it serving as a means for expanding participation. Rather it operated as a vehicle of power through the operation of a traditional patron-client order.

#### IV. COMMUNIST PARTIES

It was within this system that the Communist Party of India worked, although initially it embarked on a fierce programme of terrorist sabotage towards the government of the newly independent India, suggesting perhaps, the operation of another idiom. However the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was anxious to cultivate an alliance with India at that time. Thus it directed the CPI to abandon its guerilla warfare and to begin cooperating with the Indian political leaders instead. So the CPI entered the electoral field.

Nevertheless, there were many within the CPI who were concerned with the CPI's subservience to the CPSU. This subservience was demonstrated clearly by the CPI's withdrawal of a commendation that it sent in 1958 supporting the Yugoslav government's new programme, after the Kremlin criticised the same programme. Moreover during the Sino-India border clashes, the Soviet Union and hence the CPI supported Indian claims to territory below the McMahon line. This was regarded as a betrayal of the communist ideal of a universal working class as it put nationalism above communism. As a result of the rising tension within the CPI a split occurred in 1964 with the emergence of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) - CPI(M) - which held itself out to be the true Communist Party of India. CPI(M) chose to continue to follow the constitutional path of parliamentary democracy. It achieved electoral success in West Bengal in 1967, forming an alliance with the United Front coalition to

form the State Government. However, some CPI(M) members, mainly youths from Calcutta believed additional action was necessary and they directed their attention to the countryside supporting a Maoist type insurgency at Naxalbari in 1967. In order to maintain electoral credibility the CPI(M) parliamentary wing, which held the Law and Order portfolio, chose to crush the uprising, demonstrating the force of their rajniti character. This led to another split with the emergence of the Communist Party of India (Marxist Leninist) - CPI(ML) - in 1969.

## V THE NAXALITES

The CPI(ML) argued that by accepting office in the parliamentary set up, the CPI(M) could not overcome the fundamental problems that the bureaucracy perpetuated.<sup>21</sup> The CPI(ML), or Naxalites, claimed to adopt a Maoist philosophy. The movement began in Naxalbari, helping the peasants seize grain, land and weapons from the landlords and plantation owners. They received moral support from Mao and the Chinese Communist Party, CCP.<sup>22</sup> The Maoist path was quite different to that which the CPI and the CPI(M) had been following. Mao focused on the rural areas, and central to his thinking was the concept of Mass Line which he regarded as the principal instrument for transforming the character of the state and of society and transforming the relationship between the two. He believed that the masses were the real heroes and that the communists had much to learn from them.<sup>23</sup> Therefore he maintained that it was important to:

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<sup>21</sup> cf S Banerjee, India's Simmering Revolution The Naxalite Uprising (London: Zed Books, 1984).

<sup>22</sup> "Spring Thunder Over India", Editorial in the Peking People's Daily of 5 July, 1967, reproduced in Samar Sen, Debabrata Panda and Ashish Lahiri (joint eds), Naxalbari and After, vol. 2 (Calcutta: Kathashilpa, 1978), p. 188.

<sup>23</sup> For example: Mao Tse-Tung, "Preface and Postscript to Rural Surveys", March and April, 1941, Mao Tse-Tung, Selected Works, vol.111, p.12.

take the ideas of the masses (scattered and unsystematic ideas), then go to the masses and propagate and explain their ideas until the masses embrace them as their own, hold fast to them and translate them into action. Then once again go to the masses so that the ideas are persevered in and carried through and soon, over and over again in an endless spiral, with the ideas becoming more correct, more vital and richer each time. Such is the Marxist theory of knowledge.<sup>24</sup>

Mao's point was that: "communists must never separate themselves from the majority of the people or neglect them by leading only a few progressive elements and the broad masses".<sup>25</sup> This included working with the party's class allies for Mao recognised that there were many valuable people outside of the party and that they ought not be ignored.<sup>26</sup>

The concept of Mass Line pervaded all his thinking: his strategic, cultural, educational and economic ideas. For example it was an integral part of People's War which developed as a means to achieving revolution by providing the people with a weapon for overthrowing oppression, capturing state power and establishing people's government. It was undertaken by politically organised masses. Guerilla warfare was based on the force of violence but it avoided direct confrontation between the force of the party and of the enemy unless its superiority was assured. It involved small peripheral but effective

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<sup>24</sup> Mao Tse-Tung, "Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership", 1.6.1943, written for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. Reprinted in Mao Tse-Tung, Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung, vol.III (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), p.119.

<sup>25</sup> Mao Tse-Tung, "The Role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War", October 1938. This report was made by Comrade Mao Tse-Tung to the Sixth Plenary Session of the Sixth Central Committee of the Party. The session endorsed the line of the Political Bureau headed by Comrade Mao. The plenary session decided on the line of persisting in the anti-Japanese united front, but at the same time pointed out that there had to be struggle as well as unity within the united front. Reprinted in Mao, Selected Works, vol.11, pp. 201 - 202.

<sup>26</sup> Mao, "The Role of the Chinese Communist Party", pp. 201 - 202.

attacks on the enemy so as to gradually weaken its defences. The establishing of base areas involved consolidating any tactical inroads made into enemy territory and it was essential to the success of guerilla warfare. The base area strategy was pursued before, during and after any direct campaign to eliminate the enemy, thus ensuring popular support and preparing people to undertake new responsibilities.

Cultural and educational work were also essential to developing Mass Line, and Mao believed that in undertaking this work it was necessary to "adopt forms and select contents suited to the existing rural conditions and to the needs and wishes of the people in the countryside".<sup>27</sup> He explained to the party cadres that the party's culture was a people's culture and that it was necessary to link themselves with the masses. This meant:

All work done for the masses must start from their needs and not from the desire of any individual, however well intentioned. It often happens that they are not yet conscious of the need, not yet willing or determined to make the change. In such cases, we should wait patiently. We should not make the change until, through our work, most of the masses have become conscious of the need and are willing and determined to carry it out. Otherwise we shall isolate ourselves from the masses. ... There are two principles here: one is the actual needs of the masses rather than what we fancy they need, and the other is the wishes of the masses, who must make up their own minds instead of our making up their minds for them.<sup>28</sup>

Mao recognised that unless these principles were followed people's participation and thus the strength of the movement could not be consolidated. Mao envisaged education as serving the process of social transformation by increasing the revolutionary consciousness and the understanding of science

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<sup>27</sup> Mao Tse-Tung, "On Coalition Government", 24 April 1945, Mao Tse-Tung, Selected Works, vol. III, p. 262.

<sup>28</sup> Mao Tse-Tung, "The United Front in Cultural Work", 30 October 1944, Mao Tse-Tung, Selected Works, vol. III, pp. 186 - 187.

and technology, developing popular understanding and capacity for action in an historically given situation.

However, he was also concerned to make education serve the practical needs of the people. Meeting the practical needs of the people was inseparable from all revolutionary tasks.<sup>29</sup> Mao pointed out that if the workers and peasants were dissatisfied with their living conditions then the expansion of the army would be affected adversely as would the mobilisation of the masses for the revolutionary war. He explained that it was wrong to think that it was impossible to spare time for economic construction because the war keeps people busy enough. In the course of a long war the people would be exhausted if the economy was not built up and the material prerequisites secured.<sup>30</sup>

Mao thought mobilisation, that is political mobilisation, was a continuous and all inclusive process. He sought to pursue the mass line throughout. It was important to his post-independence economic strategy which was based on economic decentralisation, both agricultural and industrial. In the absence of large capital resources Mao regarded this as necessary to mobilise man-power and industrial resources which would be a step towards a line of rapid industrialisation based on the development of heavy and large scale industry. In implementing his economic policy and in his enthusiasm to achieve high economic objectives during the Great Leap Forward, Mao lost sight of the Mass Line but as the economic policy failed, he reviewed his tactics and he was able to re-emphasise the role of the Mass Line.

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<sup>29</sup> Mao Tse-Tung, "Pay Attention to Economic Work", 20.8.1933. This speech was delivered at the economic construction conference of 17 counties in Southern Kiangsi in August 1933. Reprinted in Mao Tse-Tung, Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung, vol. I (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1975), p.135.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 189.

The Naxalites aimed to follow this strategy and sought to work amongst the peasantry, forming party groups and establishing base areas, advancing towards the seizure of power through armed struggle. Their influence quickly spread throughout rural West Bengal and the neighbouring states, especially tribal areas. It seemed that a new political idiom was emerging, that is a Maoist one, which included a number of lokniti type of ideals breaking the stranglehold of some aspects of the traditional idiom over the modern political power structures, allowing for greater participation although still promoting a polity in which the centre had ultimate responsibility. However most of the Naxalite cadres were "young iconoclasts"<sup>31</sup> from Calcutta who harboured a deep sense of frustration and oppression with the dominant power structure.<sup>32</sup> Mostly they wanted to establish themselves within that power structure and they saw Maoism as a way to attract attention to their cause rather than develop something new. This is shown by the cadres' tendency to oversimplify Mao's ideas, reducing it to armed struggle which they maintained was "the only correct road for the Indian revolution; there is no other road whatsoever."<sup>33</sup> Moreover class annihilation of political, economic and social authority was identified as an integral part of this way.<sup>34</sup> Charu Mazumdar, who emerged as the Naxalite leader believed this was the best way to destroy the state machinery although he did not advocate this as an end in itself. Rather he saw it as a vital stroke releasing the revolutionary momentum of the peasants.<sup>35</sup> He believed it would be effective only if it was part of a broader and more comprehensive plan that educated the peasants about the total Maoist based Naxalite politics.

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<sup>31</sup> Banerjee, Simmering Revolution, p.208.

<sup>32</sup> cf *Infra* Chapter Four.

<sup>33</sup> "Spring Thunder", p. 190.

<sup>34</sup> Charu Mazumdar, "On the Political-Organisational Report", that is his speech at the first congress of the CPI(ML) in 1970, published in Sen et al, Naxalbari, vol.2, pp. 291 - 296.

<sup>35</sup> Bannerjee, Simmering Revolution, p.113.



Yet even though Mazumdar seemed to have a greater comprehension of the Maoist philosophy than most of the cadres, he accepted the inevitability of the continued operation of the constitutional framework. He even acknowledged the possibility of benefits from some legal changes.<sup>36</sup> He also acknowledged the role of class allies, explaining that not everyone who was not a Naxalite was an enemy of the cause.<sup>37</sup> However the Naxalite movement largely developed into one of terror. Killings appeared indiscriminate and there was no attempt to establish real people's courts that could justify the killings.<sup>38</sup> Some landless artisans were annihilated also, without any real explanation, creating panic. Further it seemed any agrarian programmes that were instituted were not properly thought through; for example money-lenders were instructed to return all deposits but were inundated with false claims, and there was no provision for new sources of credit.<sup>39</sup> Their movement was seen to present the government with a Law and Order problem. Thus it was ruthlessly suppressed so that many cadres were imprisoned, tortured or even killed. The Naxalites soon lost peasant support and were isolated in the countryside. They had not understood Mao's advice that "a leading group that is genuinely united and linked with the masses can be formed only gradually in the process of mass struggle and not in isolation from it."<sup>40</sup> The CPI(ML) quickly became a truncated party and the Naxalites were ineffective as a revolutionary force.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.76.

<sup>37</sup> B Upadhyay, "On the Thoughts of Charu Majumdar", 7.6.75 in Sen et al, Naxalbari, vol.2, p.71. See also Charu Mazumdar, "A Note on Party's Work in Rural Areas", 18.11.1971, reprinted in Sen et al, Naxalbari, vol.2, pp.319-320.

<sup>38</sup> A Correspondent, "A Report on Birbhum", 26.6.1971, Sen et al, Naxalbari, vol.1, pp. 116 - 117.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Mao, "Methods of Leadership", p.118.

However they had established themselves as a political force, provoking a strong reaction from government forces. Moreover they influenced a rethinking within the saintly cum voluntarist idiom. That is a rethinking on the relevance and role of Gandhi type voluntarist ideas, for in spite of their violent approach they raised many lokniti ideas of involving the grass roots at a very basic level, mobilising them towards their own solutions, reinforcing the voluntarist ideal of the need to go beyond the constitutional framework in order to overcome the rajniti phenomenon that it seemed to support.

## VI M N ROY

The significance of the Naxalites can be highlighted by reference to Manabendra Nath Roy who had also thought that a communist style of politics would be the most appropriate. Roy had been involved with the initial founding of the Communist Party of India but had become disillusioned with communism after Lenin's death, and during Stalin's rise. He reasoned that concepts of state ownership and planned economy would not by themselves end exploitation of labour nor necessarily lead to an equal distribution of wealth.<sup>41</sup> He explained that the basic idea is "that the individual is prior to society, and that freedom can be enjoyed by individuals."<sup>42</sup> Thus he supported the thesis that to make democracy effective: power must always remain vested in the people and there must be ways and means for the people to wield sovereign power effectively, not periodically but from day to day."<sup>43</sup> He thought this would best be

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<sup>41</sup> M N Roy, "New Humanism Principles of Radical Democracy" Thesis 10. These theses were adopted by the Third All India Conference of the Radical Democratic Party, held in Bombay from 26.12.1946 to 30.12.1946, and are published in Roy & Spratt, Beyond Communism (Calcutta: Renaissance Publishers, 1947).

<sup>42</sup> M N Roy, "Marxism and Radicalism", concluding speech in the discussion on the draft theses submitted to the delegates' session of the Third All-India conference of the Radical Democratic Party, Bombay, 27.12.1946, in Roy & Spratt, Beyond Communism, p.117.

<sup>43</sup> "New Humanism Principles", Thesis 10.

achieved by people's committees embracing the entire people. He explained that the people's committees would "be small replicas of the state composed of them. Being small, they cannot crush the individual. On the other hand, in a small corporate unit, the potentialities of man can have greater freedom to develop. These units will constitute the pyramidal structure of the state."<sup>44</sup> He envisaged parliament at the apex of the pyramidal structure, and the political organ of society, that is, the state would be under a standing democratic control.<sup>45</sup> Roy saw economic decentralisation as going hand in hand with political democracy advancing towards the goal of freedom. Thus he thought that the economy should be based on production for use and distribution with reference to human needs, and also that it should be based on production for use and distribution with reference to human needs, and also that it should be based on direct participation of the entire adult population through people's committees.<sup>46</sup> There was no place for any political parties for Roy believed that they prevented people from exercising their individual sovereignty. His ideas were accepted by the Radical Democratic Party that he himself had founded. Consequently the party decided to disband itself at its Calcutta conference in December 1948.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Clearly, direct parallels can be found between Roy's ideas of a decentralised democracy and the abandonment of a legitimate role for political parties and Gandhi's ideas on the same. The parallels presented by the Naxalite movement with voluntarist thought are not as direct, but they challenged the credibility of the dominant power structure and the failure of the institutional framework that supported it to bring about social and economic changes. Moreover the

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<sup>44</sup> M N Roy, "Marxism and Radicalism", p.126.

<sup>45</sup> New Humanism Principles", Thesis 14.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., Thesis 18.

Naxalites' actions influenced JP's thinking and the thinking of some of the organisations, that will be studied in the later chapters, and which had direct contact with the Naxalites, such contact they saw as emphasising the immediate relevance of their own ideas to the Indian political situation.<sup>47</sup>

Hitherto voluntarist politics in independent India, that is since Gandhi, had remained outside constitutional style politics, largely ignoring it as will be seen in the next chapter. The state had only accorded the voluntarist sector a very limited role. However it would seem from the Gandhian perspective, that the voluntarist bottom up approach with initiatives and responsibility being taken from below, had the potential to expand both the nature and content of politics. It could redefine politics so that it would be relevant at the local level: emphasising the needs and demands of the poor such as health issues and rights, community resources, raising awareness, engaging in dialogue, generating employment opportunities, promoting economic self-reliance, responding to prevailing injustices and needs at a far more meaningful, immediate and practical level than the legislatures have achieved. The voluntarist approach could thus provide new popular links with the political process integrating popular demands in an expanded political process rather than isolating them. This would not mean immediately abandoning all forms of government by gradually transforming and empowering the local communities. Nor is it to say that the voluntary sector would succeed where institutions of the state failed.

Gandhi's emphasis was on the voluntarist sector operating in local communities developing local solutions and having the power of control at the local level, responding to specific and immediate situations, and taking on all facets of life. Operating at the local level would have the distinct advantage of flexibility and open endedness that the bureaucratic modern power structures could not

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<sup>47</sup> See below: particularly Chapter Two and Chapter Five.

achieve. Further the voluntarist idiom would not be constricted by narrow or short term goals of capturing state power, that preoccupied the political parties.

To operate effective changes at the local level would require that local people recognise a problem and want it to be solved; further that they are conscious of the need for change, feeling the oppressiveness of the prevailing system and thus a concern to undo it.

However rural people are not a homogeneous mass. Rather they tend to be isolated, dispersed, and conditioned for passivity, resigned to the prevailing situation, afraid, indifferent and anxious to avoid responsibility. Passivity is closely bound up with ignorance and dependence compounded by illiteracy and poor communication networks.

To be successful the voluntary sector would need to develop education and organisation creating a consciousness and mobilising people towards their own empowerment, economically, socially and politically, focusing on the exercise of free will by the individual requiring a consciousness based on self-restraint and mutual cooperation with people thinking in terms of collectively identifying themselves with others. Programmes could involve moves to decentralise political authority, open access to media: decentralisation of economic structures and establishment of cooperatives, as well as extending freedom of thought and expression. Such proposals could be put into immediate practice amongst like-minded people as an alternative to the dominant institutions. It is such practical steps that tend to be more the essence of voluntary organisations in this thesis than any speculating about an ideal society.

The central voluntarist concern is to promote the idea of freedom, living and working with others towards social institutions that are voluntary, loosening the

authority of coercive and authoritarian structures that the government upholds or is seen to represent. Roy believed that once sufficiently large numbers of men and women were moved by the urge for freedom to educate themselves, the process would accelerate under its own momentum. Nevertheless, while the government structure was defined in terms of the modern idiom, voluntarism would need to be concerned more with an ongoing process not just an end product, that is a process of developing self confidence and awareness of rights so as to enable people to respond to new situations as they arose. It would be a systematic move away from concentrating on the process of the state, that is from rajniti towards lokniti. This was what JP was concerned to achieve, and the next chapter examines the evolution of his ideas on this subject.

## CHAPTER TWO

### EVOLUTION OF JP'S THOUGHT

#### I. INTRODUCTION

Jayaprakash Narayan sympathised with the frustration of the Naxalites over the existing political system although he did not agree with their means. He hoped to help them overcome their frustrations by seeking to revive what he considered to be Gandhi's ideas of non-violent struggle and mobilisation for social change, towards participatory democracy.

Actually JP came rather late to Gandhi, becoming fully convinced of the totality of Gandhi's philosophy only after Gandhi's death, when he demonstrated his faith by joining with Vinoba Bhave and the sarvodaya movement. JP's own initiatives in Gandhism began when he broke away from what he perceived as Vinoba's more extensive but superficial bhoodan and gramdan programmes and began, instead, to concentrate his efforts more intensively on mobilising people in Musahari, consolidating the bhoodan and gramdan gains. But the real momentum in his thinking became apparent in 1974 when he responded to the calls for government accountability by the Bihari students and he decided to join their campaign against government inaction and corruption. He brought a new light to the Gandhian legacy which had hitherto adopted Vinoba's approach of gentle persuasion and avoided direct confrontation with perpetrators of injustice. This chapter is essentially descriptive, tracing the evolution of JP's thought.

## II. JP PRE-INDEPENDENCE

Nevertheless it is important also to look at his ideological searching during the pre-Independence and early post-Independence years, when he was not yet convinced of Gandhism, as this throws valuable light on his later years.

JP first became involved with politics and, indeed, Gandhism in 1921 when he rallied to Gandhi's call to students to join the non-cooperation campaign and leave their government-sponsored colleges. JP still wished to continue his studies though, so he left India for the United States where, he had heard, students could find work in order to pay for their educational expenses. While studying in the United States JP was introduced to the writings of M N Roy who propounded the merits of Marxism.<sup>1</sup>

JP was attracted to these ideas, which he saw as providing the revolutionary path to the new society that he desired. In 1929 he returned to India, "convinced that the central problem of human society was inequality of wealth, property, rank, culture and opportunity."<sup>2</sup> However he did not join the Communist Party of India. M N Roy's disillusionment with the Comintern influenced this decision and it was reinforced by Lenin's thesis on the role of communists in national independence movements of the colonies.<sup>3</sup> Thus he disagreed with the CPI's opposition to the Indian National Congress, which it denounced as bourgeois. JP agreed that the Congress organisation was

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<sup>1</sup> cf Jayaprakash Narayan, "Towards Reconstructing the Polity" based on an inaugural address to the All India Radical Humanist Association Conference, Calcutta, December 1973, published in Voluntary Action, XVI (March-June, 1974): 1.

<sup>2</sup> Allan & Wendy Scarfe, J.P. His Biography (New Delhi: Orient Longman Ltd, 1975), p.63.

<sup>3</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Towards Reconstructing the Polity," p.1.



dominated by bourgeois forces but he recognised it as the main force in the struggle for independence and believed that the principal task was to ensure it stayed on the right path. Meanwhile it was necessary also to maintain the path for socialism. This led to JP's initiative in founding the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) in 1934. He explained:

The party should take only an anti-imperialist stand on Congress platforms. We should not make the mistake of placing a full socialist programme before the Congress. An anti-imperialist programme should be evolved for this purpose suiting the needs of the workers, peasants and the lower middle classes. It is necessary for us to be as tactful as possible. On no account should we alienate other anti-imperialist elements by intolerance and impatience. The Congress constructive programme should not be obstructed or interfered with. It should, however, be scientifically criticised and exposed.<sup>4</sup>

In this manner JP hoped to wean the anti-imperialist forces in the Congress away from their current bourgeois leadership, bringing them under the leadership of revolutionary socialism.

After the outbreak of the second world war JP hoped to step up the independence movement and he advocated the launching of a struggle against the British. He was subsequently imprisoned. During his imprisonment the Congress launched the Quit India movement. Thus encouraged, JP escaped from prison and joined the underground forces until his rearrest about 12 months later. This period, and indeed the time up to independence saw his open advocacy of the use of violent methods to overthrow the British.<sup>5</sup> Yet at the same time he began to lean increasingly towards Gandhi with regard to

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<sup>4</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan in a statement adopted at the second conference of the Congress Socialist Party, Meerut, January, 1936, reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol.2, Politics in India, ed. Brahmanand (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1978), p.2.

<sup>5</sup> Brimal Prasad, "The Making of JP's Political Philosophy" India Quarterly, 35 (1979): 491.

reconstruction after the achievement of independence; he said:

The free Indian nation shall work for peace between nations and total rejection of armaments and for the method of a peaceful settlement of national disputes ... The law of the land will be based on the will of the people freely expressed by them. The ultimate basis of maintenance of order shall be the sanction and concurrence of the people.<sup>6</sup>

He continued:

The political and economic organisation of the state shall be based on principles of social justice and economic freedom. While the organisation shall conduct to the satisfaction of the national requirements of every member of society, material satisfaction shall not be its sole objective. It shall aim at health, living, and the moral and intellectual development of the individual. To this end to secure social justice, the state shall endeavour to promote small-scale production carried on by individual or cooperative effort for the equal benefit of all concerned. All large-scale collective production shall be eventually brought under collective ownership and control and in this behalf the state shall begin by nationalising heavy transport, shipping, mining and heavy industries. The textile industry shall be progressively decentralised. The life of the villages shall be reorganised and they shall be made self-governing units, self-sufficient in as large a number as possible.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile JP was disappointed with the Indian communists and their attitude of non-cooperation with the CSP and he was concerned about reports of Stalin's purges.

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<sup>6</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "My Picture of Swaraj", a draft resolution for the Ramgarh Congress sent by JP, General Secretary, All India Congress Socialist Party to the Working Committee and published by Mahatma Gandhi in the Harijan, 20.4.1940, under the caption "Jaya Prakash's Picture", reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol.1: Search for an Ideology, ed Brahmanand (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1978), p.52.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p.53.

### III. SARVODAYA PERIOD

Around Independence time, JP became concerned about the role Congress appeared to be adopting, as it began to convert itself from an independence movement into a parliamentary party, changing its constitution accordingly. Gandhi had advocated the disbandment of Congress after independence and JP supported that view. JP thought it ought to change its name so that the great traditions associated with Congress "should have been kept unsullied by party politics."<sup>8</sup> Moreover he saw Congress as becoming a party representing vested interests concentrating on power and personal advancement. He went so far as to say that there was no difference between the British Raj and the Congress Raj.<sup>9</sup> For example, JP maintained that Congress was behind the formation of the Indian Trade Union Congress (INTUC) and that Congress effectively controlled INTUC's attempts to break smaller unions by employing violence where necessary.<sup>10</sup> Further, the new Indian Constitution introduced in 1950 strengthened the centralist powers of the Union government through such provisions as the central government's powers over the states, and the government's Emergency powers. Thus JP thought that the Congress leadership was becoming more bureaucratic, forgetting its grass roots type of constructive work and the people also, concentrating instead on power and personal advancement.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Looking Back", Report of the Sixth Annual Conference of the Socialist Party, Nasik 1948, Bombay. Published in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol.2: Politics in India, ed. Brahmanand (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1978), p.91.

<sup>9</sup> Said to a crowd of 20,000, Lucknow, 23.6.1948. Reported in the Free Press Bulletin, and cited in Scarfe(s) JP, p.212.

<sup>10</sup> cf Ibid., pp.221-222.

<sup>11</sup> cf Ajit Bhattacharjea, Jayaprakash Narayan (Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1975), pp.89-90.

Consequently JP believed that it was necessary for the Socialist Party to leave the Congress. He argued that Congress was not an instrument of socialism, and that to convert it to such was "not merely the problem of defining its objectives and drawing up a programme but also of converting it structurally into a labour or rather a proletarian party embracing both the peasants and workers."<sup>12</sup> Thus the CSP changed its name to the Socialist Party, and it severed its Congress connections.

JP emphasised the need for the Socialist party to undertake extra parliamentary work for he maintained that state power or parliamentary politics were not the only means of developing a socialist society. Rather, struggle also had to be activated outside the formal constitution and administrative organs of government. This required preparing the masses psychologically for struggle, with the follow-up building of mass organisations that would work towards developing collective strength and unity. He argued that if a party became purely a political party then it was doomed.<sup>13</sup> Consequently JP emphasised: organisation, agitation, trade union struggle, constructive work such as education and establishing cooperatives. Also JP attempted to institute a constructive programme into the party, and this entailed members going into the villages for an hour a week. This failed because there were few volunteers. Most socialists concentrated on parliamentary style politics.

Unfortunately the action of severing ties with the Congress served to highlight the Socialist Party's own weakness with regard to the parliamentary field. It fared very poorly in the 1952 election for although the party gained the second

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<sup>12</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Will the Socialists Leave the Congress?" National Herald, Lucknow, January 1948, reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol.2, p.81.

<sup>13</sup> cf Bhattacharjea, Jayaprakash, pp.89-90; also Scarfe(s), Jayaprakash, p.232.

largest percentage of votes (10.6%) it won only twelve out of the Lok Sabha's 489 seats.<sup>14</sup> Needless to say there was disappointment within the party. This manifested itself in personal bitterness and policy disagreements. There were some moves within the party towards consolidating Marxist elements and questioning the viability of democracy.

Nevertheless JP maintained that "Democratic socialism must become our life's mission, we must accept democracy and all that it stands for, thus alone can we reach the goal of socialism".<sup>15</sup> He urged the party against turning to Marxist ideas of class struggle. The party leadership, particularly in Bihar, criticised his policies as leaning towards what they considered to be Vinoba's reactionary ideas of conciliation rather than conflict. This dissatisfaction with JP's ideas was exacerbated in 1952 when JP embarked on a fast after the Railwaymen's, Postmen's and Defence Workers, and the All India Post and Telegraph Unions failed to gain the raise they sought. Many socialists had difficulty coming to terms with this action as it seemed to contradict Marxist materialism. Moreover the fact that JP claimed the fast was for purely personal reasons, and was not to try to bring pressure on the government, did not facilitate their understanding.<sup>16</sup>

JP's emphasis was increasingly on construction. He was particularly conscious of the failure of the Soviet experience to achieve the ideal of a people's state for he believed that it had not moved beyond a bureaucratic state enforced by dictatorship. He stated in an address to the Socialist Party:

I do not believe in doctrinaire philosophy. When I talk about the

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<sup>14</sup> W H Morris-Jones, The Government and Politics of India (London: Hutchinson, 1971), p.184.

<sup>15</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Ideological Problems", a paper presented at the Conference of the Socialist Party, Patna, March 6 -10, 1949, reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol.1:102.

<sup>16</sup> cf Scarfe(s), Jayaprakash, pp.266-276.

principles Gandhiji stood for, his teaching and practice and the lessons these have for the socialist movement, I am quite serious. It is a pity that you have nothing but ridicule for such a revolution. I feel this had a direct bearing on our ideas. There is so much confusion in the socialist movement the world over. We are still moving in the old ruts and have refused to learn the lessons which experience has taught us. We must not forget the tragedy of European social democracy. Do we want to repeat the same tragedy in India?

Gandhiji tried to evolve a new method of social change. He preached a new set of values to lift our public life from the morass in which it has fallen. We cannot pooh pooh this, by calling it surrender to Gandhism.<sup>17</sup>

JP asked: "Why should we not combine the Marxian thought with the thought and practice of Mahatma Gandhi and achieve a synthesis of our own"?<sup>18</sup> He reasoned: "Let us not forget that Marxist philosophy is incomplete, it will ever remain so. For scientific thought ever grows and with every addition it becomes richer in content".<sup>19</sup> Marx, JP pointed out, had not faced nor visualised the situation faced by the Indian socialists, so what the Indian socialists needed was a fresh approach and original thinking.<sup>20</sup>

Part of JP's new thinking was the establishment of Sokhodeora Ashram in 1954 on a grant given by J R D Tata. The ashram's philosophy was social and religious, with its ideal being to form a perfect community. It was deliberately established in a relatively inaccessible area so that it would not have the advantages of government services. Rather it would have to develop its own services, and hopefully thereby become a centre for experimentation from which surrounding villages could learn. Unfortunately, in its early years of

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<sup>17</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Ideological Problems", p.102.

<sup>18</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "New Doctrine", Janata, 13.9.1953, reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol.2: 222-223.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p.222.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p.220.

running the ashram was troubled with bickering amongst the workers, and although they looked to JP for direction, he was too much preoccupied with Vinoba's social revolution to give the time the ashram workers wanted.<sup>21</sup> Over the years the ashram undertook a number of local initiatives such as the introduction of grainbanks and cooperatives, and it established some important services such as a leprosy centre and khadi spinning and weaving centre.

Meanwhile, within the Socialist Party tensions continued. After the 1952 elections it effected a merger with the Kisan Mazdoor Praja and became the Praja Socialist Party, with a view to strengthening its electoral position. However in 1955 its parliamentary role was challenged when the Indian Parliament declared that its new object was to establish a socialist state, and it purported to adopt a number of the PSP's general platforms such as fixing land ceilings, and ensuring equitable distribution.<sup>22</sup> This seemed to take away the Socialists' reason for remaining separate from the Congress, and questions arose as to whether they should collaborate with the Congress, as well as reproaches for having left the Congress in 1948.

However, for JP it was but a short step to announce that he no longer believed in a materialist philosophy as the basis for constructing a new society, robbing man "of the means to become truly human", with "no rational incentive to be good".<sup>23</sup> JP was attracted instead by the "new politics" of sarvodaya which Vinoba's bhoodan movement appeared to offer. Vinoba was Gandhi's spiritual successor in independent India, and the bhoodan or land's gift movement was a movement for voluntary land reform; it aimed to persuade land-owners to

<sup>21</sup> cf Scarfe(s), Jayaprakash, pp.333-342.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp.263-264.

<sup>23</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, Socialism, Sarvodaya and Democracy, ed Brimal Prasad (Bombay, 1964) quoted in Brimal Prasad, "The Making of JP's Philosophy", p. 493.

voluntarily donate portions of their land to the landless. The strategy was pursued by the lok sevaks walking around the countryside approaching the landlords. Vinoba hoped to bring about a three-fold revolution: changing people's hearts, creating change in their lives and changing the social structure. JP saw Vinoba's movement as supplying the means to the social revolution towards which he had devoted most of his life. So realising the "inadequacy and futility of service through power"<sup>24</sup> JP diverted his attention to the bhoodan movement, giving up "politics" - that is conventional parliamentary politics - refusing to accept any elective or other office in the Socialist Party.<sup>25</sup> Later he actually resigned from the PSP, withdrawing completely from old politics.

Bhoodan moved towards gramdan under which land was "villagised". This contrasted with bhoodan which involved donations from individuals who retained ownership over their remainder while the donated portion benefited individuals. Under gramdan land-owners surrendered all their property rights to the village. So the emphasis shifted from the individual to the community collective. This was seen as a very important step towards a decentralised political structure based on economic equality with the community as a whole assuming responsibility for decision making with regard to the management of the land.

Through bhoodan and gramdan JP hoped to work towards the establishment of a partyless democracy, abolishing all centres of power. This did not mean that JP was calling for the immediate abolition of parties but he did believe that "the more this new politics grows, the more old politics shrinks".<sup>26</sup> As he pointed

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<sup>24</sup> JP in a statement issued to Praja Socialist Party members when he left the party in 1957. Quoted in A Bhattacharjea, Jayaprakash Narayan, p.176.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 145.

<sup>26</sup> JP in his statement to PSP members. See A Bhattacharjea, Jayaprakash Narayan, p. 177.



out later, Gandhi had been clear about the limitations of the state being the sole instrument for creating the India of his dreams, but at the same time Gandhi had realised that even if the state had the best men and the best policies it could not deliver the goods by itself. The bhoodan and gramdan movements, on the other hand seemed particularly appropriate to India's condition. They started quite independently of the state forces and they concentrated on land. Land symbolised power and power represented violence. By seeking to change the hearts of those who held power, persuading them to donate their land, and even surrender total ownership, the bhoodan and gramdan movements aimed at undermining the violent order. It was reasoned that by distributing land, power would be distributed later.<sup>27</sup>

Bhoodan and gramdan provided ways to mobilise the people, allowing for the process of change from the old way of life to a revolutionary one. The "old politics" had not been able to achieve this. It passed laws but they were not implemented. For example, in 1969 JP explained that:

. . . even though the ceiling law was passed not one acre of land was redistributed as a result of surplus being declared over the ceiling. Whereas we have been able to distribute 365,000 acres of land which are fit for cultivation. . . . This is the story of bhoodan and this is the social and economic change brought about by bhoodan.<sup>28</sup>

In changing people's hearts the sarvodaya movement hoped to work towards bringing into effect the aims of these otherwise meaningless laws.

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<sup>27</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Face to Face", a pamphlet published in December 1970, reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol.1: 230 - 253.

<sup>28</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Technique of Social Revolution", inaugural address at the National Conference of Voluntary Agencies, New Delhi, June 1969, reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Revolution, ed., G S Bhargava and U N Phadnis (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1975), p.106-107.

However, much of the bhoodan land was uncultivable and some land was subject to legal dispute.<sup>29</sup> Gramdan encountered difficulties such as opposition from moneylenders to grant peasants credit without land as security once a village had opted for gramdan.<sup>30</sup> Also many larger land-owners were reluctant to join gramdan when the majority of villages had done so.<sup>31</sup> Vinoba's response was to attempt to revitalise the movement by watering it down into a sulabh gramdan, or gramdan made simple, which involved a major concession to the principle of private ownership as hereditary rights were to maintain over 95% of the donor's lands. The process of sulabh gramdan involved three stages. Firstly there was prapti which meant ensuring village commitment to sulabh gramdan. Secondly was pushti which involved the implementation of the primary conditions of gramdan with the establishment of a gram sabha and a village fund, with land gifts verified, legal titles transferred and one twentieth part of land distributed amongst the landless. Thirdly was nirman which meant the mobilisation of resources through the gram sabha and beginning a programme of reconstruction and development. Vinoba launched a toofan (whirlwind) campaign to promote sulabh gramdan, but the campaign only related to prapti and the emphasis was on achieving targets not fulfilling the concept of gramdan. It was thought that the implementation of pushti and nirman would be most effective if undertaken in an organised manner once the whole state had opted for gramdan.<sup>32</sup> Yet nirman was surely the precondition for statewide gramdan as it involved developing the necessary consciousness required to take on the responsibilities of gramdan? JP was concerned by this

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<sup>29</sup> Geoffrey Ostergaard, Nonviolent Revolution in India (New Delhi: Gandhi Peace Foundation, 1985), p.17

<sup>30</sup> Geoffrey Ostergaard, Nonviolent Revolution, p. 21.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 23.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 25.

apparent backing down but accepted it. Nevertheless he was disappointed with the turn the movement was taking. It appeared weak, failing to take a firm stand, making the conflict so easy as to be rendered useless. The movement did not seem to really change hearts. Instead of mobilising people the sarvodaya workers were more concerned with fulfilling targets than achieving any qualitative change and when the target was reached they would move on, allowing the area that they had just left to return to the old ways.

#### IV. IDEAS ABOUT LINKING VILLAGE LEVEL VOLUNTARY ACTION TO WIDER STRUCTURES

During the period with the bhoodan and gramdan movements JP did not isolate himself. He remained actively in touch with other voluntary action groups. He recognised the value of their work, of sharing their knowledge and of pooling resources. This was reflected in the Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development (AVARD). JP had been a driving force behind the setting up of AVARD in 1958, and he served as its president from 1960 to 1979. The main aims of AVARD included: developing areas of mutual cooperation and understanding amongst those individuals or groups who are contributing to the welfare of the rural community; to strengthen existing agencies and foster new ones where necessary and possible; to work as a clearing house of information and knowledge on the work of organisations and government departments engaged in rural development; to aid and assist all activities connected with rural development; to arrange seminars and conferences; to discuss and study problems facing its members in research and evaluation; to promote publicly the work of rural development; to act as a channel for the interchange of ideas and experience; to diffuse useful knowledge regarding rural development and the activities of its members; to establish contacts with affiliates, or affiliate with other organisations with similar goals, both national and international.<sup>33</sup>

JP also remained in touch with the wider politics. He remained informed about and commented on the politics that he had officially left. He proposed institutional and other reforms that required "political" or government initiative. In particular, he encouraged the State government instituted system of local government, panchayati raj, as an important measure in reconstructing the Indian polity by broadening the base of democracy. Panchayati raj was established between 1959 and 1962 and generally consisted of three levels of representative bodies: gram panchayat (village), panchayat samiti (block), and zilla parishad (district). The village level committees were elected directly and the two higher levels were elected indirectly through the lower tiers.

JP proposed a number of amendments to the panchayati raj scheme. He envisaged a non-party democracy built from below, centred on people's committees, along the ideas of Gandhi and M N Roy. Firstly, he believed that the base ought not to rest on the gram panchayat but on the gram sabha, that is, the entire adult membership of the village community.<sup>34</sup> He thought the panchayat could function as an executive of the gram sabha which should have the power to set up other committees and teams for specific purposes.<sup>35</sup> He also believed that "Panchayati Raj must not be terminated at the district level but extended forward up to New Delhi".<sup>36</sup> JP explained that there was a need for government to be near the people and that this required political and economic decentralisation with less and less functions and powers the higher up the level of government one went.<sup>37</sup> He envisaged each level from bottom up doing all

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<sup>33</sup> Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development, Twentythree Eventful Years (New Delhi: AVARD, 1981), pp.2 - 3.

<sup>34</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, Swaraj for the People, (Varanasi: Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, 1977). pp.16 - 17. First published in 1963.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p.17.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p.40.

that it was competent to do and when there are tasks that lie beyond its competence it had to federate with other authorities of the same level to create a higher authority, that is, the block or district or state or union levels.<sup>38</sup> He did not see this as making the central government weak but "strong, powerful, streamlined and effective".<sup>39</sup> JP thought: "a top heavy sprawling centre poking its finger into every pie might have the appearance of strength and power, but in fact, it would be weak, flabby, slow-moving and ineffective".<sup>40</sup>

When JP initially proposed his version of panchayati raj he suggested that representatives at the state level be elected from the district and then representatives at the union level be elected from the state level. However, he recognised that the individual citizen might feel this was too great a distance for him to have any control over his representative. Also he realised that as the number of electors at each level became smaller there would be greater opportunity for monied interests to corrupt them. Thus he put forward the suggestion that the state and union sabhas' representatives be elected by the gram sabhas with the assistance of electoral colleges, one college for each constituency. Each gram sabha should select two delegates to its electoral college. They could be selected by calling for nominations and then voting by show of hands. If there were more than two nominations, then the candidate with the least number of votes should be eliminated. The balloting procedure should be repeated until only two names remain. JP maintained: "This would be a simple inexpensive procedure and, as the gram sabhas gather experience in conducting meetings, passing budgets and making other collective decisions as a result of their vital role in Panchayati Raj, this electoral procedure should become one of their simpler jobs".<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

The next step would be for the electoral council to be convened with a call for nominations and then have the nominations put to the vote. Anyone receiving more than a given minimum of votes should be declared candidates for that constituency. JP emphasised the importance of the process not being divisive and he urged that the electoral councils set up only one candidate per seat for he believed that competition between them created an unnecessary excitement and was a waste of energy. Moreover, each representative would represent his whole constituency even those who opposed him. So if the representative was to develop an affinity with the whole electorate it was better that he was not opposed. Once the electoral councils chose their candidates the names would be sent to the gram sabhas who would vote. JP had not decided whether it was preferable to count individual citizen votes or just the overall gram sabha votes.<sup>42</sup> He hoped that eventually all elections throughout the panchayati raj scheme would be without contest and he cautioned: "self-government through faction fighting will not be self-government but self-ruination".<sup>43</sup>

JP put forward a number of conditions that he saw as necessary for achieving the potential of panchayati raj. Firstly, it was important to educate people. However, the type of education he envisaged was radically different from conventional Western-type education.<sup>44</sup> It was predominantly non-bookish, emphasising practical and technical education with emphasis on training in agricultural techniques. It included large scale practical adult education. There was a role for schools but JP saw self-education as the core, reinforced by a

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 43.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, pp. 43 - 45.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 19.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 35.

sharing of knowledge through cooperative societies and access to resource facilities such as libraries. Self-education was the basis of his search for self-government.

Secondly he urged that political parties refrain from interfering with and trying to convert panchayati raj into wings of their own organisations. He believed that parties pause before acting in order to consider the possible consequence of that action for their party and party interest was not necessarily the same as people's interest.<sup>45</sup> Also JP said that the practice of parties setting up candidates limited the choice of voters and vitiated democracy.<sup>46</sup> He thought that in that sort of system it was natural for would-be candidates to look up towards party leadership and try to win its favour in order to obtain a party ticket, thus strengthening the forces of centralisation and the concentration of power. JP wanted power pulled downwards to the people and his third condition was that there be real devolution of power. He understood that there might be a hesitation to pass on responsibility either on account of lack of confidence in the people or of reluctance to surrender power but he thought that withholding responsibility would lead: "to an attitude of irresponsibility in the people who will forever be on the lookout for heroes and miracle makers to solve their problems".<sup>47</sup>

Fourthly he urged that each level of government be given its own minimum resources, explaining that it should not be the prerogative of the state government to advocate sums to these bodies. He specifically recommended

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 25.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p. 476.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, pp. 13 - 14.

that land revenue be in the hands of panchayati raj and any other revenues as necessary for autonomy. However, JP added that this did not mean that they should not receive funding from the state and central governments too.<sup>48</sup>

JP's fifth condition was that the local panchayats should be able to exert authority over civil servants under its charge although he also remarked that civil servants should be able to discharge their duties without improper interference.<sup>49</sup>

Sixthly he re-emphasised the importance of fullest participation being at the village level in the gram sabha which should meet as often as possible and that all important matters should be placed before it.<sup>50</sup>

Finally, he gave this idea further support by stating that the working of panchayati raj should be outside the purview of State government. He was concerned that State government was tied up with party politics and that this would influence government decisions. So he urged that any job of assisting, guiding and supervising the establishment, working and development of panchayati raj should be with a non-political, autonomous body, that is a body not rooted in party politics and the civil service, and not subject to undue influence from them. JP envisaged something akin to the Election Commission or Universities Grant Commission. This body would ensure the allotment of funds to panchayati raj were properly paid out and utilised, making sure also that the higher tiers did not unduly interfere with the lower ones.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, pp. 14 - 15.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, pp. 15 - 24.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, pp. 24 - 27.



JP believed that self-government through panchayati raj based along the lines he suggested was essential to democracy for through the dispersal of power, communities and communal representative bodies would be able to exert a decisive influence. He warned that the system resting on individual unorganised voters has a tendency towards the concentration of power at the top with organised parties run from above by small and powerful elites playing the decisive role.<sup>52</sup> He did not think that elected representatives of unorganised voters were or could be brought under popular control whereas where there was direct participation there was close contact. At the same time he held it was important to realise that the economic and political structures were not separate from each other and that if political decentralisation was to be effective it was necessary to effectively decentralise the economy too. JP explained that a decentralised economy was important because it was democratic and because it would yield immediate benefits to the masses offering employment on a mass scale.<sup>53</sup>

JP said first the economy "must be a small machine and labour intensive economy" but it also had to be efficient and productive, and that cost, production, consumption and employment had to be balanced.<sup>54</sup> Second he said a decentralised economy had to aim at the full utilisation of local and regional resources, both human and material, relating this to the satisfaction of local and regional needs.<sup>55</sup> He was not saying that surpluses in one area could not be exchanged for surpluses in another. Thus he thought that considering the land:man ratio and the rate of population growth it would be necessary to integrate some industrialisation immediately with agriculture, that is, "agro-

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 37.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, pp. 34 - 35.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 32.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, pp. 32 - 33.

industrial" which did not only refer to the processing of agricultural products but also radios, electrical goods, cycle parts etc as were needed in the region.<sup>56</sup>

His fourth suggestion was that the organisational pattern of decentralised industry and trade had to be different from that in the centralised sector, whether private or public. It should not be bureaucratic or exploitative. He thought it should be of the owner-worker cooperative type.<sup>57</sup> Fifthly, he thought the political institutions of panchayati raj should play an important role in this economic development, although he did not know quite how this would be done.<sup>58</sup>

JP concluded:

The real issue is that of devolution of power and decentralisation of administration. Power . . . cannot be devolved, nor administration decentralised if (a) there were no institutions and centres of self-government below the present state level, and (b) all the different levels of government were not organically or structurally integrated together, so that the higher level drew its support and authority from the lower ones and the whole structure rested ultimately upon the broad base of the gram sabha, comprising the entire adult population of the country.<sup>59</sup>

JP realised though, that the restricted aim of panchayati raj was to obtain full public cooperation in the execution of development programmes.<sup>60</sup> Basically this was how panchayati raj was utilised. It was never given the opportunity to take up planning or implementation. It was not given an adequate resource base and in practice party politics played an active role in the panchayats.<sup>61</sup> JP's

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p. 33.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, pp. 33 - 34.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 46.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 41.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

<sup>61</sup> cf Dilip Hiro, Inside India Today (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), pp.50-51;

electoral reforms were not followed through nor were the panchayats linked to the state and central government in any other form.

JP worried increasingly about the state of the wider politics and in 1966 he expressed this concern, telling students in Patna that it would be in the interest of democracy if the Congress suffered electoral losses at the 1967 polls for he felt that the ruling party needed shock treatment.<sup>62</sup>

## V. POSITIVE ACTION

In December 1970 JP published a pamphlet entitled "Face to Face" in which he flagged his moving into a more active phase.<sup>63</sup> JP had become disappointed with the direction of the bhoodan movement and he was able to sympathise with the impatience of the Naxalites though he would not condone their methods. He recognised that "Naxalism was 'primarily a social, economic political and administrative problem' and 'only secondarily a law and order question'".<sup>64</sup> So when the Naxalites threatened some of his fellow sarvodaya workers in Musahari, an area where Naxalites had been active, he said:

The emergence of such danger to our lives appeared to me as a God-send. I had been feeling for quite some time past that our movement was losing its fire, and we, its workers, were becoming stale and flabby of spirit. One of the reasons this seemed to be was that our work was so bland that it involved no personal danger to us, nor demanded any great sacrifice.<sup>65</sup>

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also T K N Unnilhan, "Panchayat Raj, Planning and the Gandhian Ideal", published in M V Mathur and I Narain, Panchayati Raj, Planning and Democracy (Madras: Asian Publishing House, 1969), pp.42-49.

<sup>62</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, The Indian Nation, 13 October, 1966. Cited in Ghanshyam Shah, Protest Movements in Two Indian States (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1977), p. 77.

<sup>63</sup> Reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol.1: 230-253.

<sup>64</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Face to Face", p.233.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. 231.

JP regarded the Naxalites as a challenge that had to be met by speeding up the process of non-violent social change. It was a call for "positive action"<sup>66</sup> on the part of the sarvodaya movement and thus JP returned to Musahari in order to evaluate the situation and consolidate the gramdan work at the very ground level through intensive work rather than the extensive and widespread strategy previously pursued.

JP's retreat to Musahari brought him very close to the people as he followed up the gramdan programme, implementing it at the grass roots level. He concentrated his efforts on the single block, withdrawing from a much wider territorial range as well as from other fields of activity. As he said, he changed "from being extensive and wide-spreading to becoming intensive and penetrating".<sup>67</sup> He became aware of the deficiencies of the gramdan movement as he discovered much of the apparent prapti work was bogus and had to be done again.<sup>68</sup> It brought him face to face with the realities of people's day-to-day lives and a gradual change could be seen in his attitude. JP explained:

To find the way we will have to go back to Gandhiji. We will find then that Gandhiji was already aware of the futility of violence and the inherent limitations of the democratic state.

Therefore his plan was to create alongside the power of the state the power of the people. . . . His means were going to be, as before, service, constructive work, conversion by gentle persuasion and when the situation required non-violent, non-cooperation or resistance.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p. 232.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p. 233.

<sup>68</sup> Geoffrey Ostergaard, Nonviolent Revolution, p. 38.

<sup>69</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Face to Face", p. 245.

Gandhi had warned that once the British left India and the alien rule had been replaced by a responsible government with proper channels for the expression of grievances then civil disobedience would no longer be an appropriate technique.<sup>70</sup> Yet the point JP was beginning to realise was that proper channels for the expression of grievances were not working as was evidenced by the Naxalite frustration, which vented itself in violence. The very fact that it had arisen brought home the need to shift from non-violent assistance to non-violent resistance. Indeed for the Naxalites to express their grievances in Bihar represented something of a failure for the sarvodaya movement to date because Bihar had been the centre of the gramdan and bhoodan movements with about 50% of the total land donated throughout India.<sup>71</sup> It became clear to JP that any solution would have to come from the grass roots, the people. It could not depend simply on the changing of hearts by rich land-owners and other powerful figures as the bhoodan movement had sought to achieve.

JP thought that "conditions seem to be ripening in the context of our present programme that may necessitate larger-scale satyagrahas".<sup>72</sup> Thus JP was concerned to revise Vinoba's programmes of "conversion by gentle persuasion". Like Gandhi, JP believed that his actions ought to be appropriate according to the prevailing circumstances of each situation that he faced. This did not mean that JP regarded himself as rejecting Vinoba but he thought that the apparent rise of dacoity, communal tension and violent social movements such as Naxalism necessitated a reappraisal of the current strategy.

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<sup>70</sup> H W Morris-Jones, The Government and Politics of India (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1971), p. 38.

<sup>71</sup> Shah, Protest Movements, p. 146.

<sup>72</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Face to Face", p. 246.

JP's actions and writings focused more on rajniti as he became more concerned with the future of democracy in India. In July 1972 JP and a number of other leading sarvodaya workers and sympathisers met in Bangalore to discuss ways to broaden the sarvodaya movement and make it more effective. Following this meeting, JP published an article: "Can a Nation Survive Without Moral Fibre"<sup>73</sup> which highlighted his perception of growing corruption, increasing bureaucratisation and the general resultant deterioration of Indian democracy under Mrs Gandhi. In September 1972 the League of Democrats was set up largely as a result of the Bangalore meeting. It was established as a non-partisan pressure group and it appealed mainly to middle class intellectuals and professional people. Unfortunately it did not provide the dynamic impetus that JP sought for the sarvodaya movement.

When Biju Patnaik (Orissa) approached JP in February 1973 and asked if he would take the lead in new efforts to unite the opposition parties, JP declined. However, he said that he would lend them moral support and be available for consultation and advice. He put forward a number of propositions that he regarded as necessary to a viable opposition party including the following points: firstly, that it must represent forces of radical even revolutionary change; secondly, the consolidation of opposition parties must be principled not opportunistic, and thirdly, that it must place before the people a positive policy and programme and not be consumed by negative aims such as "Indira hatao" - get rid of Indira.<sup>74</sup>

JP believed that the state sector had become a "bottomless pit from which little is retrieved as compared with the vast amounts sunk into (it)".<sup>75</sup> Of course,

<sup>73</sup> cf Ostergaard, Nonviolent Revolution, p. 48.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, p. 53.

<sup>75</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "First Things First", Everyman's, 28.7.1974. Reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol. 4: 15.

JP did not accept that the state, by itself, could deliver democracy ensuring true freedom for each individual, but it was important "to see that the state was in the best hands available and that it followed the right policies, programmes and plans".<sup>76</sup> So he called out to every individual to join in and struggle for the assertion of those rights. In particular he urged the youth, especially the students, to march towards a "real people's Democracy"<sup>77</sup> as a better alternative to the party democracy which he held was "democracy based on and manipulated by political parties . . . a most unsatisfactory and defective system of democracy".<sup>78</sup>

JP's "real people's Democracy" was along the lines of the panchayati raj system that he had previously proposed, based on active functioning, partyless people's committees that would discuss common problems and evolve cooperative and collective forms of action. However, he realised that establishing this type of political order would be an evolutionary process, and that the prevailing political structure would continue to dominate for a period of time. He hoped that as the committees gradually strengthened, they might group together horizontally and vertically to form secondary institutions of people's democracy, selecting delegates by unanimous decision (general consensus or *nem con*). He saw the Delegates' Council role as selecting people's candidates for election to parliament, and then liaising between gram sabhas and the representatives.<sup>79</sup> Thus he thought to operate within the existing constitutional parliamentary structure, while gradually eroding the role of parties within that structure, developing instead a more direct means by which people could participate in government. The viability of these ideas presupposes a strong cadre movement able to encourage and support laying the

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<sup>76</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Face to Face", p. 245.

<sup>77</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Reconstructing the Polity", p. 5.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 1 - 5.

foundations for such an organisation and its subsequent development. JP recognised this and envisaged it as a role that the youth - in particular the students - could fulfill. The suitability of the students to assume this role will be examined shortly, but first there is a need to understand the totality of the changes that JP anticipated through the people's committees. They were not simply political but spiritual, economic, social, cultural, educational and ideological.

JP did not formulate a comprehensive blue print that he presented in one go; rather his ideas were the accumulation of many issues with which he had been concerned at various times throughout his period with the sarvodaya movement. As regards the spiritual framework, JP believed that man is both matter and spirit and that both his material and spiritual needs have to be fulfilled. Materially this means food, clothing, dwelling etc but whilst this should be adequate, in good taste, pleasing and practical as the case may be, JP urged that it should not be excessive, that there be no wastefulness and no craze for fashion.<sup>80</sup> His ideas implied limitation on consumption and seemed to have spiritual connotations in line with the saintly idiom, for JP regarded craving, excess and bad means together with wealth as anti-spiritual.<sup>81</sup>

Economically he emphasised the importance of agriculture. For industry he urged: medium industry, small industry, and rural industrial development. He thought ownership patterns should be based on: the individual (family) as self-employed producers; the community (village) ownership; the cooperative ownership; and the private profit-based small entrepreneur ownership employing a moderate number of workers. JP envisaged public corporation patterns as more prevalent amongst larger enterprises. He hoped workers'

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<sup>80</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, Prison Diary (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1977), 9.9.1975, p. 62.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.



participation in management would be tried but recognised that without proper training they might not be effective. Nevertheless he saw a role for the workers in influencing their own welfare.<sup>82</sup>

Further, JP was concerned that "all productive units, including agriculture, must be keenly sensitive to ecological considerations, as well as considerations of beauty and cleanliness".<sup>83</sup> In this regard JP was very interested in E F Schumacher's ideas on economics and his concept of intermediate and appropriate technology. JP invited Schumacher to India in the early 1960s. In 1972 under JP's initiative the Appropriate Technology Development Association began under the wing of the Gandhian Institute of Studies, Varanasi. It later moved to Lucknow, where it promoted the concept and practice of appropriate technology in India within technical colleges, universities, government and industry. It aimed to bring industry that could be locally owned and managed into rural communities so as to create new and more productive employment.

Socially and culturally, JP wanted to see all barriers to equality broken down, in particular, the caste system, the dowry system, superstitions etc. He wanted an equal role accorded to all people irrespective of caste, race or gender.

JP thought that education should be essentially practical. Specifically, he wanted a rural school to be developed with courses in science, language, literature, economics (emphasising cooperatives and cooperation), gram sabha and decision making and enforcement, accounts and book keeping, agriculture, rural industry, hygiene, sanitation, bacteria and biology, horticulture, zoology, food and nutrition, gas plants, compost and manure. Overall he emphasised

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p. 64.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

that special emphasis be given to details relevant to the particular geographical areas in which courses were conducted.<sup>84</sup>

JP also wanted to see a change in higher education because he wanted a revision of Gandhian thought not only at the practical field work level but at an academic level, reorienting social sciences, developing Marxism and other theories and practices in order to bring about a "no poverty society". He was a joint director of the Gandhian Institute of Studies in Varanasi for a number of years. and then he initiated the establishment of the Institute of Social Change and Social Welfare in Calcutta, 1971, with the Gandhi Peace Foundation and the Gandhian Institute of Studies as joint sponsors.<sup>85</sup>

The Institute of Social Change and Social Welfare was to be an interdisciplinary research cum social change centre aiming to solve problems through experimentation and research based on the principles and practices of non-violence. The Institute's primary tasks were to reorient the social sciences towards a new concept of development and to seek the pathways to reach out to a "no poverty, no affluence society".<sup>86</sup> The founding of the Institute in Calcutta, the capital of West Bengal, is significant for it represented a real attempt to introduce a Gandhian influence in the wake of the Naxalite upheavals, offering an alternative to both the conventional form of higher education the Naxalites apparently rejected, and the terrorism they seemed to embrace. JP pointed out that Marx also had envisaged a society in which the state would wither away, that is, a partyless democracy. Thus JP implied that his ideas were not inconsistent with Marx.<sup>87</sup> He reinforced this by saying:

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> After JP's death the Institute was renamed the Jayaprakash Institute of Social Change in his honour.

<sup>86</sup> "Notes and Queries", Continuum 1 (October 1981): 57 - 61.

<sup>87</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Important Changes", Everyman's, 3.8.1974. Reprinted in

"The Marxist task . . . is to try to alter the world. In my humble way I am trying to alter the world".<sup>88</sup>

The Institute of Social Change and Social Welfare began by making extensive studies on the problems of the Naxalite movement and the uprooted people in Bangladesh. It was involved with programmes of relief and rehabilitation which included voicing its concern over the treatment of the Naxalites in the Bengali jails as well as seeking constructive ways in which to channel the Naxalites' energies after their release from prison. Also the Institute sought to establish contact with non-violent voluntary groups. In addition, the Institute started undertaking a number of private and government sponsored training programmes such as: job training courses on methods of working with people for the staff of voluntary organisations, and, training for the government's ICDS programme, that is mother and child primary health care scheme. These contacts and programmes enabled the Institute to explore, share and evaluate new ideas.

When students in Gujarat and Bihar began to protest in 1973 and 1974 their main concerns were with campus amenities such as hostel accommodation and cheap text books, as well as with the growing numbers of educated unemployed. Their claims were indicative of the defective and outdated education system, and it could be suggested that their plight epitomised that of the nation for the education system did not meet their needs or prepare them for their role in society. JP thought that the universities had been corrupted; cheating was apparently commonplace, making a sham of the whole system.<sup>89</sup>

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Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol. 4: 96.

<sup>88</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Total Revolution Explained", Sunday, 6.4.1975. Reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol. 4: 142.

<sup>89</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "The Path of Revolution", Hindustan Times, 26.8.1974, interview with JP by N S Jagannathan, Deputy Editor of the Hindustan Times reprinted in Jayaprakash

Thus JP held that it was in the students' interest to change it, and he responded to their plight by urging them to take the year off from their studies and devote their time and energies to the movement.

He called on them to:

take non-partisan and constructive action and give a lead to the people and help create a climate of public opinion which could be a deterrent to unethical conduct of politicians or businessmen or any other section or group whose action degrades national life and saps the foundations of our democracy.<sup>90</sup>

JP seemed to regard the students as the Gandhian alternative to the revolutionary working class. He reasoned that they had no apparent vested interest in the continuance of the prevailing system, and at the same time they had the necessary leadership to the movement for "total revolution". However, his appraisal of the students' potential was not realistic. They were largely from the upper and middle classes and they were rooted to the social and economic structures that those classes represented.<sup>91</sup> Moreover JP did not seem to take into account the fact that students are not a stable class but a transitional force, with many of each year's students being different to the last.

## VI. BIHAR MOVEMENT

It was the student protest in Bihar that finally led JP to break away formally from Vinoba and his "positive satyagraha". He turned instead to struggle. The

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Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol. 4: 82.

<sup>90</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "First Things First", p. 11.

<sup>91</sup> Shah, Protest Movements, p. 161.

students themselves sought out JP on 19 March 1974, the day after a large student demonstration that had been fired upon, apparently by Bihar government forces. JP agreed to provide the guidance they wanted so long as they gave the movement priority over political parties etc. He called for the dismissal of the Bihar government and legislature, and urged the students to seize upon the moment so that they could organise themselves into student struggle committees and set about mobilising people towards a "total revolution".

JP maintained that it was up to the students to play a decisive role if the primacy of the people was to be established, and their victory over money, falsehood and brute force was to be secured.<sup>92</sup> This was the revolutionary path. They were: "to fight corruption and misgovernment and blackmarketing, profiteering and hoarding, for the overhaul of the education system, and for a real people's democracy".<sup>93</sup> The purpose of the movement was both "internal and external change, changing the entire social frame from within and also from the outside, individuals as well as institutions".<sup>94</sup> However, the students were from a fairly narrow social base with a fairly limited perspective, and were generally accepting of the caste system and the economic structure. They were not prepared to sacrifice their education, and as such, did not boycott the universities in significant numbers in spite of JP's urgings.<sup>95</sup>

Nevertheless, the students' initial enthusiasm appeared great. They circulated a petition demanding the resignation of the Bihar assembly, and collected about a

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<sup>92</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Youth and Democracy", Everyman's, 22.12.1973. Reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol. 4: 45..

<sup>93</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Violence and Protest", Everyman's, 6.4.1974, reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, Vol.4: 57.

<sup>94</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Why Total Revolution?", Everyman's, 22.12.1974, reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol.4: 115.

<sup>95</sup> Shah, Protest Movements, p. 127.

crore of signatures and thumb prints.<sup>96</sup> All over the state public meetings were held and resolutions passed in support of the demand.

A five week programme was initiated on 24 April 1974. Of itself it would not achieve a "total revolution" but it was hoped that it would awaken the whole of Bihar. All the while JP emphasised its non-violent nature and, moreover, its non-coercive character for its aim was to be "demonstrative, propagative and educative".<sup>97</sup> He said it was only if occasions should arise that in order to ensure the availability of essential commodities a peaceful satyagraha might be launched. The five week programme then began with a Jana Jagaran week, during which it was sought to explain the movement's objectives that is, the students' original demands plus the subsequent ones, in particular the dissolution of the government and the Legislative Assembly. On May Day they aimed to rally the support of all workers, both rural and urban, through their sabhas, unions, etc. The following week was to concentrate on developing organs of struggle. After that they were to focus on the resignations of the ministry and the dissolution of the assembly, organising meetings in each electorate. During the week, 16 - 22 May, the importance and responsibility of everyone tackling problems of corruption, especially in government and the black market were to be highlighted. This week included a twelve hour fast by the children of corrupt persons so as to impress on the offenders the need to mend their anti-social ways. Finally, the last week was geared towards the need to reform the education system, drawing this to the attention of parents and guardians.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid, p. 111.

<sup>97</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "A Programme for Five Weeks", Everyman's, 27.4.1974, reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol. 4: 60.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, pp. 58 - 62.

JP chaired a committee that was established by the Bihar Movement on 6 August 1974 in order to prepare a statement of policy on new higher education.<sup>99</sup> The statement presented a tentative scheme for the beginning of a parallel stream of higher education in Bihar. Basically it envisaged a decentralised university system. There would be a central organisation, that would train teachers, and serve as a clearing house to: examine policies and practices in education in other parts of the world; to coordinate, guide and supervise study centres; and to house a central library that would serve as a feeder to the libraries in the study centres. Most work would evolve around the study centres which would be regionally based according to population density. Each study centre would accommodate about 300 students who would be involved in the planning of curricula as well as many of the jobs in the study centres. All the teaching would be interdisciplinary and the curricula would include: instruction in theory or knowledge drawn from books, practical work in villages and training in productive work such as crafts, rural industry and immediate technologies. The students would be required to do some specific assignments with suggested topics including the nature of polity and the need for electoral reform, corruption, price rise and inflation, unemployment, study of land reforms in Bihar, a survey of health needs, and processes relevant in specific areas.

It was thought that examinations would take the form of open book and/or take home exams. The bulk of the teaching would be through correspondence with some specific courses at weekends or in the form of summer schools. Thus it was thought the students would be free to join any employment, constructive programme or productive self-employed activities. Side by side with their

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<sup>99</sup> Committee chaired by Jayaprakash Narayan on 6 8 1974, "Statement of Policy on New Education", Continuum 1 (April 1982): 38 - 47.

course work the students were to be expected to continue the work of the Bihar movement in the towns and villages. However, the students generally were not really interested in these changes. They were career-minded.<sup>100</sup>

The movement's first priority was the purification of government. JP claimed this did not in any way reduce the importance of broader social, economic, political, spiritual and ideological, cultural and educational change for the revolution was a continuing process. The struggle for the election was only a part of the struggle for "total revolution". Nevertheless, it was necessary because the government was obstructing the movement. Therefore, the progress of the movement required that the government was removed. The election could serve as a rallying point to launch the movement as it would involve the people in ensuring that the elections were free and fair and that the electorate were aware of just how they were casting their votes. JP maintained:

To make the people shed their fear and stand up to any tyrant or unjust ruler is one of the more important tasks of nation building. Unless we, as a people, acquire the capacity to stand up to injustice, oppression and corruption we would remain a weak nation.<sup>101</sup>

JP believed that this step would lead to the uplift of all. In support of this step the intellectual and professional dominated League of Democrats was relaunched in April 1974 as Citizens for Democracy. It was concerned to protest against government corruption but it was not a radical organisation. Ostensibly it was independent from the Bihar movement, and at this stage it was not committed to "total revolution". Citizens for Democracy reported on a lack of public confidence in the conduct of elections and recommended

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<sup>100</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Appeal to Teachers and Students", *Everyman's*, 10.9.1974. Reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, *Towards Revolution*, ed G S Bhargava and U N Phadnis (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1975), p. 166.

<sup>101</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Total Revolution Its Future", p. 188.



moderate electoral reform. Although this was important it did not represent a popular movement for struggle.

Meanwhile, Vinoba was concerned by the blatant antagonism of the movement towards the government. He argued that it was not the job of the sarvodaya movement to oppose the government. On the other hand, JP was saying that if the government was suppressing democracy then they ought to oppose the government. Vinoba patiently expressed his disapproval, explaining: "... nothing is going to come out of this agitation. Men may come and men may go, problems will remain forever".<sup>102</sup> However, JP said that whilst he agreed that of itself the resignation would not solve the problems, in view of the government's misdeeds and its failure to correct these, then its resignation was justified. He said that speaking for himself he felt that he would have betrayed his responsibilities as a citizen had he not fully supported the demand for the resignation of such a minority, and the dissolution of such an assembly. He continued by saying that if the sarvodaya philosophy stood in the way of his acting in this manner, then he would repudiate such an understanding of that philosophy. In fact his understanding of his responsibilities as a sarvodaya worker was that he ought to raise his voice as strongly, and act as effectively as possible, to condemn and fight against such abuse of democratic power and democratic institutions. After all, the people gave the government their mandate in good faith. If that mandate was abused then it was their right, indeed duty, to withdraw that mandate.<sup>103</sup> So when Vinoba was reported to have responded to the government firing of a student procession on 5 June 1974, saying that he left it to God for his verdict, JP retorted that he wished Vinoba would leave it to

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<sup>102</sup> Vinoba Bhave, quoted in V Nargolkar, JP's Crusade for Revolution (New Delhi: S Chanand Co., 1975), p. 45.

<sup>103</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Limitations of Mandate", 10.6.1974, reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Revolution, p. 153.

God to judge the movement in Bihar and its calling for the resignation of the Bihar ministry.<sup>104</sup>

JP believed people were "no longer prepared to remain helpless spectators of wrongs and evils and suffer patiently like dumb driven cattle".<sup>105</sup> As JP understood it: "the very foundation of democracy is belief in man - individual man - not as a means but as an end. It is this faith in man, in his dignity, in his rights and responsibilities, that distinguishes democracy from non-democracy".<sup>106</sup>

Through Vinoba's bhoodan and gramdan programmes, JP had tried concentrating on changing the heart of the stronger members of the community towards the weaker ones but he had found this had little effect on the situation. Therefore he decided that he should advise the weaker sections to organise themselves and to become strong enough not necessarily to fight against the stronger sections but certainly to claim their rights, enjoy the privileges which the law had given them in regard to the land reform, the housing and similar other benefits bestowed on them by law.<sup>107</sup> For too long they had depended entirely on legislation, administration and planning but to no avail. Caught up in a corrupt hierarchy with no people's participation, these institutions had failed to implement the reforms. Now JP advocated that it was for people to organise themselves in order to ensure that they would be able to move towards a partyless democracy along the lines of Janata Sarkar.

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid, p. 156.

<sup>105</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Why the Mass Revolt"?, 23.5. 1974. Reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Revolution, p. 129.

<sup>106</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "First Things First", p. 12.

<sup>107</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan. "Total Revolution Some Clarifications", interview with JP by Brahmanand, Patna, December 1977, in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol. 4: 200 - 201.

Nevertheless he did not talk about this in connection with the struggle in Bihar.<sup>108</sup> Rather partyless democracy was the ultimate aim for he recognised it was something that could be realised only in a casteless and classless society, and that would take years to realise.<sup>109</sup> Meanwhile JP hoped that people's struggle committees would grow by taking up popular issues, putting forward non-party candidates and gradually taking the place of the parties below.

At the same time JP hoped that people would work towards self-government and self-management by doing without any wing of the administration that was not necessary to the management of their own affairs,<sup>110</sup> such as the law courts. JP believed that as the movement progressed it would spread throughout the country. With the devolution of political power, there would be a decentralisation of economic power as land would be distributed and people would work for themselves instead of being dependent on rich land-owners.

JP encouraged Gandhi's constructive programme as the basic means to mobilise people towards the construction of a new society by enabling them to become conscious of their individual and combined strength. JP's idea of constructive work was a very broad one for he believed that what was required was: "the atmosphere of struggle". He continued:

It seems to me that in such an atmosphere psychological forces are created that attract men and drive them to accept challenges to change themselves and change others. In the placid atmosphere in which gram swarajya was working such psychological forces remained dormant.

<sup>108</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Important Changes", Everyman's 3.8.1974. Reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol.4: 96.

<sup>109</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "The Revolt Against the System", interview with R K Karanjia, Editor of Blitz, May 1975, reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol.4: 121 - 122.

<sup>110</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "The Path of Revolution", p. 81.

Spiritual and moral appeals, the saintly influence of Vinobaji, did bring about some remarkable moral changes in some individuals. But they never became a social or psychological force.<sup>111</sup>

This approach shows some similarity to Mao's ideas on revolutionary consciousness. JP's idea of constructive work was adapted according to the prevailing situation. It extended from meeting people's basic needs such as promoting village industries and village sanitation to moral and social aspects, for example, removing untouchability. He also encouraged the resolution of local conflicts by mutual adjustments and raising electorate awareness. Where necessary he urged that active struggle be undertaken, in order to check profiteering and hoarding and to eradicate corruption, to implement ceiling and other progressive laws relating to land and to prevent evictions. To JP, constructive work involved a struggle against external injustices and also internal decay such as drunkenness and it served to generate some ideal of what to put in their place as well as some experience of what a new society would be like.<sup>112</sup>

JP wanted to raise people's awareness so that they might act. This could be done through village struggle committees and delegates' councils. They could mobilise public opinion to protest against or lend support to certain government candidates, serving as watch dog organisations against abuse by the people's representative's positions. If abuse occurred then public action could be mobilised against the offender. However, the role of the committees was envisaged as far more than that of a watch dog for it was thought they could participate in wider programmes such as land distribution and ending the dowry system. They would be all encompassing moving against corruption in public

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<sup>111</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, 22.8.1975, Prison Diary, p. 22.

<sup>112</sup> Narayan Desai, Guidelines for People's Committees (Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan: Varanasi, 1978), pp. 32 - 36.

office, blackmarketeers, and against socio-economic injustices such as benami transfers. The committees could take up these questions. People in each village would be aware of what frauds were being perpetrated. What was needed was united action. Some particular groups could be mobilised within themselves, such as agricultural labourers, Harijans, Adivsasis, Muslims, industrial labour and the unemployed. However, JP foresaw difficulties in involving breadwinners, who had family responsibilities. Besides JP warned against their becoming so involved as to disrupt production because so much depended on that. Thus he voiced his opposition against too frequent resort to bandhs for they upset production and served no purpose.<sup>113</sup>

The central organisation of the movement was the Bihar Chhatra Sangharsh Samiti, which was based in Patna. It coordinated local chhatra sangharsh samitis throughout the state. Under JP's leadership the Bihar jana sangharsh samiti was developed also; this served as a non-student central organisation. Similarly it coordinated local jana sangharsh samitis. The movement mobilised through bandhs, gheraos, meetings, processions, distribution of literature, hartals, and dharnas, fasts and non-cooperation. Of course, JP stressed the need always to bear in mind the purpose of what they were doing and not to yield to sensationalism just for its own sake. A Bihar bandh was organised between 3 - 5 October, 1974, paralysing normal life all over the state. This involved bringing trains to a halt by squatting on railway tracks. Some supporters did try to take short cuts by removing rails and cutting telecommunication lines. However, JP remained firm, emphasising that only peaceful means should be employed and that railway and other property should not be tampered with, stating that "people think of short-cuts only when they lack mass support".<sup>114</sup>

<sup>113</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "The Path of Revolution", pp. 84 - 85.

<sup>114</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Stop the Trains", Everyman's, 5.10.1974. Reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol.4: 106.

These programmes though focused on political issues and did not comprehensively take up the full scope of JP's vision for people's government. Moreover, interest was not sustained; for example, major processions were held on 5 June and 4 November 1974 and 18 March 1975, but each successive demonstration was smaller than the last. The 18 March procession was only half the size of the one in November.<sup>115</sup> Further, attempts to popularise the movement were opposed.<sup>116</sup>

The movement's main emphasis was the purification of democracy. This extended to the national level in June 1975, when the Supreme Court handed down its ruling against Mrs Gandhi, declaring her 1971 election invalid and barring her from elective office for a period of six years. For her part, Mrs Gandhi appealed against the judgement which was eventually overturned. In the meantime JP joined with other opposition groups in a call for her resignation, organising a mass rally and urging people to join nationally to resist corruption and illegitimate government.

Mrs Gandhi reacted by declaring an Emergency but even before its issuance, she had JP imprisoned. Nevertheless he continued his campaign for democracy. One aspect with which he was particularly concerned was the ignorance of the people for, had they been aware of their rights, and also of their duties, they would never have accepted the situation. The CFD rallied to his call and promoted itself as a forum for civil liberties against the Emergency. It organised local committees throughout the country to provide legal assistance to secure the release of political detainees and improvements in conditions of detention, creating public opinion against inhuman treatment of detainees and

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<sup>115</sup> Shah, Protest Movements, p. 111

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, p. 128.

helping (if necessary) families of detainees. It condemned Mrs Gandhi's proposed changes to further centralise power within the constitution in 1976, and it demanded the release of political prisoners, early elections and the restoration of press freedom. The CFD was at the forefront of non-violent protest against the Emergency but it was not an action-oriented group. JP believed that action was necessary too. He said: "Therefore our present task is to go to the people: (a) to educate them about the fundamentals of democracy and their relevance to their life; and (b) to organise them in appropriate organs of struggle."<sup>117</sup>

Writing to Mrs Gandhi from prison JP said he believed that in a democracy, where government comes from the people, the people have the right to recall the government and the legislature if they have been corrupted and have abused their mandate. He had reflected upon the situation and come to the conclusion that the main explanation for the government's actions was corruption which had dried up all the normal channels of redress or reform so that it was necessary to turn to satyagraha.<sup>118</sup> A democracy, he believed, was about lokniti not rajniti and Mrs Gandhi represented the latter. It was not a question of choice between democracy and the nation as Mrs Gandhi was reported to have claimed.<sup>119</sup> Rather it was a choice between democracy and authoritarianism, and Mrs Gandhi had chosen the latter.

## VII. ELECTION OF THE JANATA PARTY

Consequently, after the Emergency was lifted it was on this platform that JP spearheaded the opposition forces as they campaigned for the forthcoming

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<sup>117</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Total Revolution: Its Future", p. 179.

<sup>118</sup> In a letter written by JP to Mrs Gandhi, in late July 1975, from prison. Reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Prison Diary, pp. 101 - 109.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

elections. As far as JP was concerned, India was at the crossroads and the path that the people should follow was that of the Janata or people's party; but this did not represent people's government, only good government.

The Janata party was an amalgam of forces that joined together in the wake of the Emergency representing a "residium of shared opposition" against the Emergency.<sup>120</sup> It included the Congress (O), the Jana Sangh, the Socialist Party and the Bharatiya Lok Dal (BLD). Congress (O) was the product of the 1962 Congress split. The Janata party had no strong ideology but leaned towards Gandhian and conservative views and tended to be bound by personal association. On the other hand, the Jana Sangh had a strong philosophy, representing Bharatiya or Indian culture through which it sought to unify all India. Also, it had ties with the Rashtriya Swayemsevak Sangh (RSS), which was recognised largely as an extremist Hindu organisation. Both the Congress (O) and the Jana Sangh were mainly urban-based parties.

In contrast was the Socialist Party. Most of its support base was rural, young and poor. It was particularly strong in the North. The BLD was born specifically for a Janata-type merger in the pre-Emergency days, and it received support from the JP movement. Its rural support tended to represent land-owners and peasants from the middle castes and it also received support from the business community. Just before the election the Janata was joined by the newly formed Congress for Democracy which split away from Mrs Gandhi's Congress (R) after the Emergency was lifted and the polls had been announced. In addition, an electoral alliance was formed with the CPI (M) and with two regional parties, the Akali Dal and the Dravidia Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) based in Punjab and Tamil Nadu respectively.

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<sup>120</sup> H C Hart, "The Indian Constitution: Political Development and Decay", Asian Survey XX (1980): 449.



Despite its diverse character, the Janata Party claimed not to be a mere alliance of parties but a new national party seeking to restore democracy. Moreover it emphasised decentralisation - social, economic and political - which JP saw as the very essence of democracy. Indeed Moraji Desai, as Prime Minister, was to explain:

We have to create a culture that is egalitarian, not exploitative - and we can no longer tolerate dual societies - rich and poor, city and village. We must not think of town and country as separate and rival entities or cultures but as integrated and independent settlements within finite regions.<sup>121</sup>

Throughout the election campaign the party argued that centralisation was inconsistent with democracy. It presented a Gandhian philosophy of development for the benefit of the poor, with employment seen as the greatest antidote to poverty to be achieved by the creation of a society based largely on self-employment. Self-employment, it was claimed, would ensure equality with freedom of the individual from exploitation of a political, economic or social nature.<sup>122</sup> The performance of the Janata government will be discussed in the next chapter.

JP's active support for the Janata presents an apparent contradiction with his concepts of people's candidates and of partyless democracy generally. JP did not actually join the party but he publicly chose to support that party over the Congress. In the absence of a robust grass roots organisation, JP had seen this as the necessary and immediate means to ensure the purification of government. That was the pressing concern. Yet in so far as JP sought to be a follower of Gandhi, this was inconsistent with Gandhi's idea that means and ends needed

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<sup>121</sup> Statesman, (Calcutta), 9.4.1977.

<sup>122</sup> C T Kurien, "Economic Decentralisation", Seminar, No. 233 (1979), p. 38.

to be interchangeable for it is difficult to reconcile his association with party politics with the notions of a partyless democracy, and people's candidates.

### VIII. JP'S LAST STEPS

After the election JP took an oath not to say anything for a full year about Janata's performance. He re-emphasised that "a people's movement is much more important than (the) formation of a new political party."<sup>123</sup> Consequently JP revived his concept of Janata Sarkar in the form of Lok Samiti for he saw this as the vehicle to organise a peaceful class struggle. However, it was not to be a Marxist type of class struggle although it clearly presupposed the support of the depressed classes. Rather JP envisaged a much wider movement, aiming as far as possible for a classless society.<sup>124</sup> In support of Lok Samiti JP also relaunched the student struggle movement, the Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini, whose members vowed not to join power politics but to work continuously towards a "total revolution", which represented the essence of voluntarist politics. Unfortunately, JP was not well, having suffered serious complaints and so he was no longer able to provide leadership to this "total revolution". He died on 8 October 1979.

### IX CONCLUSION

JP left no blueprint for "total revolution" for he thought permanent social and political institutions would become outdated. He explained previously: "that everything in the world is changing ceaselessly".<sup>125</sup> Like Gandhi his was an ideological search for the truth. In that search he raised the question as to whether there is any alternative to the present political nexus other than forming

<sup>123</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Total Revolution: Its Future", p. 182.

<sup>124</sup> Statesman (Calcutta Weekly Overseas version), 17.9.1977.

<sup>125</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Total Revolution: Its Future", p. 187.

a new party or bringing together some of the existing parties, although he allowed attention to be diverted to, and in support of, party politics. Nevertheless JP succeeded in inducing some rethinking on patterns of development and democracy and the socio-economic balance. In particular, he sought to mobilise the masses by educating and organising them through the youth. In this respect he was concerned with both socio-economic type constructive work and struggle. Struggle as he saw it, involved positive action for the purification of government and society generally. Thus he hoped people would be able to ensure an effective devolution of power so that they might be involved, effectively in nation building. This rethinking was found in the ideology, organisation and work of a number of voluntary agencies that have operated largely outside the conventional political sphere. Its strengths and weaknesses will be tested against their practice.

## CHAPTER THREE

### LIMITATIONS OF JP'S IDEAS IN THE CONTEXT OF HIS POLITICAL ACTION

Before examining any other organisations which would appear to have taken up some of the voluntarist political type ideas expressed by JP, it may be useful to examine the limitations that some of JP's modern political actions placed on the consistency and practicality of his voluntarist ideas; specifically his involvement with the Janata movement. Of course it must be acknowledged that the Janata was not itself a product of JP's voluntarist ideas, nor were the Janata's operations. However JP's association gave both the Janata and its activities a certain legitimacy. This chapter is not concerned with measuring JP's ideas in terms of his actions but with attempting to understand the limitations that may be imposed on his voluntarist ideas in the context of the real world. In demonstrating this, the essence of JP's voluntarist ideas that social and political institutions should not be seen as "permanent and immutable" is re-emphasised.<sup>1</sup>

#### I. JANATA

The Janata was supposed to symbolise the "total revolution" although JP always maintained that the "total revolution" went far beyond the ousting of Congress. It held itself out as offering a new way, promising not only to purify the government but to ensure social, economic and political decentralisation, suggesting a radical overhaul of the existing system. The

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<sup>1</sup> Allan and Wendy Scarfe, J.P. His Biography (New Delhi: Orient Longman Ltd, 1975), p.413.

Janata failed. It proved to be caught up in self-interest so it was unable to present a new national party and it did not institute any revolutionary changes.

During the pre-Emergency period there were attempts at a merger of the opposition parties but they failed because the parties refused to forget their separate identities, ideologies and self-interests. The common experience under Mrs Gandhi enabled them to put aside their differences temporarily, uniting for the purpose of overthrowing Mrs Gandhi's regime. However, this was only an election arrangement and after the election the differences became apparent, in particular, between the Jana Sangh and the Congress (O). The Jana Sangh was largely a party of militant Hindus who faced something of a dilemma in the early days of the Janata victory, when it became necessary to decide how to approach the merger issue. They did not want to abandon their ideology nor lose face in the public eye. Eventually they decided to merge with the Janata but also to function separately as a cohesive unit.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile the Congress (O) was one of the smaller Janata parties although it boasted some of its most powerful men, that is, ex-Congress men who occupied important positions in the party and the government. These two parties continued to function as separate parties within the Janata with a view to taking control of it. The Socialist Party also maintained its own line while the two regional parties, the Akali Dal (from the Punjab) and the DMK (Tamil Nadu) could never pretend to operate as national parties.

The fact was that the Janata did not represent a new party. This maintenance of separate identities was indicative of the Janata leaders' refusal to view the party as "a child of the revolution".<sup>3</sup> Instead their main concern seemed to be with

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<sup>2</sup> This decision was never recorded officially but an unofficial report is related in J A Naik, From Total Revolution to Total Failure, (New Delhi: National Publishing House, 1979), p.41.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.34.

providing an alternative to the Congress and their main aim in government (that is besides capturing power within the party) was to get rid of corruption. The Janata did not overhaul the administration or the education system. Instead it demonstrated itself as almost as repressive a force as the Congress (I). It resorted to banning public gatherings in New Delhi, where Mrs Gandhi was scheduled to speak.<sup>4</sup> Then when many students in the universities in Bihar and UP became restless, Prime Minister Moraji Desai threatened to close them down forever.<sup>5</sup> In making this threat Desai had no thought of building up a new education system and in the meantime engaging the students and teachers in productive work in the rural areas. Rather, the Prime Minister saw it simply as a law and order solution, and he was quite prepared to abandon both the students and the education system.

Furthermore, looking at the Sixth Plan and its policies of radical change, few new ideas actually emerged. The main thrust of the new industrial policy was to register and demarcate technology in mode and scale of operations in industry towards self-employment, that is, the effective promotion of cottage and small industries, widely dispersed in rural areas and small towns. Yet this was no real departure from past policies. For example, the 1956 Industrial Policy Resolution emphasised the need for a prominent position to be given to village and small industry. However, the Sixth Plan also involved specific measures of change such as requiring whatever could be produced by cottage industry to be so produced. In so far as these products were being produced by the larger sector their reservation for production by the cottage industry sector would promote cottage industry. On the other hand if the larger sector was not interested in the production of such goods then their reserved status would be

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<sup>4</sup> AAP Reuter, "119 held by police in rallies for Mrs Gandhi" Sydney Morning Herald, 10.10.1977.

<sup>5</sup> The Times of India, 17.4.1978, reported in Naik, From Total Revolution, p. 51.

quite otiose, doing nothing to contribute to decentralisation. Also some of the reserved products such as spare parts were dependent upon the demand from the large manufacturing sector. Other measures involved controls and licences in order to regulate industry. Although such regulation might be in the interest of industrial health, such as the prevention of monopolies and restrictive trade practices, it tends to concentrate power in the state rather than the individual.

The Janata government sought to compensate any centralisation by developing block planning, that is, shifting from the Central Planning Commission level to the block level. Of course the effectiveness of this device depended on those who were responsible at that level. If it was to be the powerful landlords using their position to their own advantage by diverting resources from the weaker sections to themselves then any real decentralisation was hardly likely to take place. This is what tended to happen in practice.

The concept of antyyodaya employed in the Sixth Plan epitomised the superficial nature of decentralisation under the Janata Party. It involved the identification of the five poorest families in selected villages each year. They were to be given grants such as land, food for work, loans, livestock, depending on their economic needs. This idea illustrated the ideal of economic resources reaching all, but by its very selective nature it could not bring about any real change to the situation of the masses. It was a symbolic rather than a fundamental approach and would seem to have been very typical of the Janata.

The Janata party's approach aimed for the benefits of decentralisation such as the protection of small industries. However, effective decentralisation requires an analysis of the forces responsible for the concentration of power that can be analysed with a view to combating them so that any attempts at decentralisation may be realised. The Janata was unable to do this. The basic reason was that it

lacked the political will. Its support base rested with the middle sectors of society - the urban middle class and the prosperous farmers<sup>6</sup> who had vested interests in maintaining the status quo, both economically and socially.

Perhaps this was most apparent in the caste-ridden society of Bihar, where Janata support came from middle or backward castes who, hitherto, had perceived their own position as one of political neglect and were disgruntled with the Congress, which they regarded as an upper caste party that looked after its own interests, and through the concept of Reservation, those of the Harijans and tribals. Thus they lent their support to the JP movement and used it until they had achieved what they wanted, that is, a backward caste leader, heading the new Janata government. The Janata supporters then sought to channel the political rewards home, meeting any alternative government action with fierce opposition. This was demonstrated by the issue of Reservation which the central Janata government introduced. It was met by considerable agitation throughout India but especially in Bihar.

Reservation of seats in Parliament, government posts and places in colleges did not make a significant difference to most Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and it ignored their essential problems in the villages, doing nothing to help their general improvement or relieve them from the brutal atrocities to which they were increasingly subjected. In fact much of the violence was seemingly inflicted to prevent laws favouring the most disadvantaged groups from being implemented.<sup>7</sup> The debate over Reservation bore little if any

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<sup>6</sup> cf A Vaidyanathan, "New Deal for the Poor?", Seminar, No.228, (1978): 51. Also, Ghanshyam Shah, Protest Movements in Two Indian States (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1977), pp. 128 - 133.

<sup>7</sup> eg "Belchi incident", which occurred on 27 May 1977 when a number of Harijans were attacked and killed at Belchi near Patna. cf infra Chapter Four, also "Belchi incident "Clear Case of Class Hatred", The Statesman, Calcutta the weekly overseas version) 23.7.1977, p.9.



relation to structural changes. Instead it served to divert attention from the real issues of altering the economic and political basis of power.

## II. REASONS FOR JANATA FAILURE

The Janata appeared as a party of opportunism and not as a people's party.

Kuldip Nayar explained the situation in the Indian Express:

The sluggishness in taking decisions apart, there appears to be less effort to weigh decisions in the scales of values; there is more belief in the ends than the means. Opening the floodgates to defectors is only one example. The result is that all the unwanted and undesirable elements are now switching their loyalty to Janata overnight. The same sycophants and turncoats are beginning to surround the Janata leaders.<sup>8</sup>

The failure of Janata though cannot be explained simply in terms of its own weaknesses. It was seen as a part of the JP movement and in many ways the failure of the Janata helps to explain the apparent failure of the JP movement. So long as JP was the spiritual leader of the movement he was also the conscience of the Janata party, but after the 1977 election JP withdrew and left that party to its task and it lost any conscience in the subsequent factional politics. It was bound to disintegrate after JP left it for he represented the only focus of agreement between the parties.

It may be argued that JP's reliance on the political parties damaged the credibility of his movement. However if JP was to organise the movement against Mrs Gandhi and the growing statism and centralisation that she represented, he had no choice but to rely on opposition parties for

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<sup>8</sup> Cited in M R Masani, "India's Second Revolution", Asian Affairs, 5 (1977): 37.

organisational support. He acknowledged early on that the opposition parties were trying to take advantage of the movement in order to expand their own influence and reduce that of the Congress, accepting the phenomena as characteristic of the party system. Nevertheless in May 1974 he proudly believed that what was important was the fact that:

the leadership of the movement never passed into the hands of any party or combination of parties. Both the movements (that is, in Gujarat and Bihar) have been largely non-partisan in nature. Neither of them has been anti-Congress as such.<sup>9</sup>

Yet JP's own political position has always been something of a reaction to the Congress hegemony. Firstly, after returning to India in 1929, he formed the Congress Socialist Party, that it might seek to keep the bourgeois forces within the Congress in check. Later he was instrumental in severing ties with the Congress because he was not happy with the path that it was operating. Then he left "politics", that is the Congress style of politics, as he did not believe it was appropriate. He joined Vinoba instead. Finally he chose to re-enter politics when he realised that the Congress was frustrating his progress towards a new social order. This re-entry however did not involve joining any party or accepting any political office although it did lead to his becoming the guiding force behind the Janata party.

The fact is that many forces in Bihar, in particular rich farmers, joined the movement after it called for the dismissal of the Bihar ministry, precisely because they saw it as anti-Congress; similarly other anti-Congress forces joined on a national scale as JP began to focus his attention on Mrs Gandhi. Initially JP may not have regarded his movement as anti-Congress as such, but

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<sup>9</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Role of People's Movement", Everyman's, 25.5.1974, reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol.4: Total Revolution, ed Brahmanand (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1978), pp.66-67..

more of a response to the students' call. Nevertheless it was not long before JP accepted Mrs Gandhi's challenge to test his movement's strength. Their positions polarised quickly. On the one hand Mrs Gandhi accused JP of trying to paralyse the government and of trying to spread disaffection amongst the civil and military forces. She would ask: what right has anyone to ask an elected government and an elected legislature to go? JP would reply that in a democracy the people have the right to ask for the resignation of an elected government if it has become corrupt and starts to misrule. He supported the adoption of regular mechanisms for the recall of representatives. By the end of 1974 JP was telling crowds that he wanted them "to see to it that the regime and the centre headed by Shrimati Indira Gandhi is ... dislodged".<sup>10</sup> This was what interested many of the movement's supporters. They were not concerned with such ideals as partyless democracy, or any revolution, but in the practical politics of the day. They saw revolution as a slogan and the movement was a vent for their dissatisfaction.

Indeed the students involved with the movement were largely a reactionary force, who were more against the Congress party than they were against the political system.<sup>11</sup> They were not interested in programmes to picket liquor shops, to disband the sacred thread or form people's committees.<sup>12</sup> Certainly the power struggle within the BCSS suggested they hardly shared JP's ideals. Most of the BCSS members belonged to different non-Congress parties, and they struggled to achieve power within the samiti. When they were not fighting it would seem that they were preoccupied with press publicity that the centralised demonstrative programmes provided and which the decentralised

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<sup>10</sup> Statement to crowds at Kurukshetra, 27.11.1974, quoted in D Selbourne, "JP Narayan A Political Morality Re-examined", Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars, 13 (1981): 48.

<sup>11</sup> cf Shah, Protest Movements, especially pp.125 - 129, and pp. 159-166.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, also, Rajiv Vora, "The Dilemma of the Bihar Movement", Youth Affairs (March 1980): 21 - 25.

constructive type programmes did not.<sup>13</sup> Many of the leaders ran up lavish expense accounts until JP restricted their spending. There was no doubt that JP was disappointed with the BCSS and sought to reorganise it though this task was not completed. Instead he concentrated on forming an alternative non-party organisation, the Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini, whose members vowed not to join any political party or associated body. The Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini will be examined in the following chapters.

JP had put much faith in the students as a revolutionary force. However, in the post-Emergency period JP realised that they were a transitional force and that: "These students today are not the students tomorrow. The new ones who come to take the place of the old ones do not have the same kind of spirit, enthusiasm and the same attitude".<sup>14</sup> It was not simply their transitional nature that reduced the students' involvement. Many had not been involved effectively from the beginning; they continued their enrollments and paid their college fees. JP's theory had not allowed for their sociological backgrounds and their consequent unwillingness to change themselves. Nevertheless in late 1977 JP said that he still had great hope for the students' movement although he admitted it was "not a very effective force at the present moment" but at the same time he did not think it dead.<sup>15</sup>

Initially, JP's movement may have been regarded as a people's movement as it received support from the urban poor over issues dealing with basic daily life such as price rises. However, the poor were not bothered with more abstract issues such as democracy, nor even with forms of government. Nevertheless

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Total Revolution: Some Clarifications", interview with JP by Brahmanand, Patna, December 1977, in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol.4: 199.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

there can be little doubt that JP's national appeal, before, during and after the Emergency brought response from a wide variety of people - all creeds and castes and every walk of life. However, this itself created problems as one of JP's biographers explained:

Jayaprakash's appeal cannot be as clear-cut as would be that of a leader of a political party who appeals only to the like minded. It is something in the nature of a national crusade and it suffers from the diffusiveness of appeal of such a crusade. It is often said of Gandhiji that 'he was all things to all men'. A similar charge of vagueness in regard to JP's objectives and programmes is made in certain quarters.<sup>16</sup>

Often, of course, Gandhi had appeared contradictory and had owned to such; what was consistent, Gandhi maintained, was that he always acted according to the truth as he saw it at that moment. It has been suggested though that:

The evolution of JP's political thought is marked less by a Gandhian grappling with the truth than by a tortured quest for truths with which to grapple. Narayan acted, and he acted with conviction. But his acting was rarely free of subsequent hesitation, of suppressed doubt and self-criticism giving way eventually to new convictions and new loyalties.<sup>17</sup>

Certainly the JP movement seemed to become more and more diluted as it developed from its original Bihar context to an all India movement, and in many ways it was contradictory. On the one hand JP declared that he was not against Mrs Gandhi and then he said he wanted to see Mrs Gandhi's government removed. Also he had said, in February 1974, that the Congress (O) and the Jana Sangh were no different from the Congress (I) but two months later he accepted their support.<sup>18</sup> Then with regard to his policy of decentralisation he

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<sup>16</sup> Minoo Masani, "Jayaprakash Narayan - a Personal Portrait of Indira Gandhi's Prisoner", Encounter, 45 (1975): 29.

<sup>17</sup> Gordon Fellman, "Leaf in a Storm: Jayaprakash Narayan as a Politician and as Saint", The Psychohistory Review, (USA) 9 (1981): 86.

was opposed, on the one hand, to the capitalist system with its centralisation and profiteering, but on the other hand he favoured many of the freedoms associated with capitalism such as minimum interference by the government and individual freedoms. The contradictions seem apparent. A society of self-employed persons suggests a capitalist base, and allowing uninhibited competition implies an inevitable concentration of ownership and economic power. However, JP did not agree with this conclusion. What must be realised is that JP's position was a moral one. He had moved beyond materialism and his janata sarkars were not so much a political objective as a spiritual one. They implied self-restraint and self-control. As he had explained earlier:

In a materialist civilisation man has no rational incentive to be good. . . . I feel convinced therefore, that man must go beyond the material to find the incentives to goodness. As a corollary, I feel further that the task of a social reconstruction cannot succeed under the inspiration of a materialist philosophy.<sup>19</sup>

His point was:

this is not a political party that it should have been a policy statement and a detailed blueprint of all the steps leading to revolution. That sort of criticism is meaningless and impractical. This is a people's movement. . . . A really revolutionary movement involving the people has to go step by step. The next step has to be formulated according to the situation as it develops with each step.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Shah, Protest Movements, p.103.

<sup>19</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Social and Human Reconstruction" in D M Brown (ed), The Nationalist Movement: Indian Political Thought from Ranade to Bhave (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970) p.176.

<sup>20</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Important Changes", Everyman's, 3.8.1974, reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol.4: 97.

Nevertheless it really was to put the cart before the horse advocating any decentralisation before a revolutionary transformation in the balance of this political power had taken place. The Janata would not and could not provide this transformation, and when JP left the Janata after the election he took with him his moral persuasion and any idea of real policy change.

Moreover JP's ideas were confused by the compulsion of the political mechanism. For example, JP asked high caste boys to give up the practice of wearing the sacred thread. Some resentment emerged and some sarvodaya workers attempted a compromise explaining that JP did not mean they discard the thread forever, only until the Assembly was dissolved, and so even this most basic measure of social reform was made a "political issue" in that it was linked to the government and the governing party rather than the "total revolution". Moreover when JP came to know of this he did not try to clarify publicly his position.<sup>21</sup> Confusion extended throughout the movement and many supporters, including sarvodaya workers, failed to understand what JP required of them.<sup>22</sup> In many ways this confusion can be attributed to JP's belief that they ought to be concerned with what was happening on the political field. This concern led to his support for agitational activity against the government. Also, it led to a split within the Sarva Seva Sangh.

### III. SARVODAYA AND POLITICS

Vinoba did not understand JP's reasoning. He believed sarvodaya workers ought to shun all politics. Often he had said that politics only disintegrates and it is spirituality that unites.<sup>23</sup> Thus Vinoba believed that instead of politics

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<sup>21</sup> Shah, Protest Movements, p.122.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.104.

<sup>23</sup> Kanti Shah, Vinoba: Life and Mission (Varanasi: Sarva Seva Sangh, 1979), p.135.

there was a need to find a new path and on 22 January 1971 he wrote in his weekly "Swarajya":

We cannot improve politics: so we have to find out an alternative for turning the present painful reality to an optimistic outlook. In quite a few years dharma should become our politics. As democracy has replaced autocracy, religion has to replace politics.

Throw aside politics; if we do not add fuel to his fire, it will extinguish by itself. . . .

My suggestion is the only non-violent course to come out of the rut of our so called self-rule, which has no moral self-restraint and is irretrievable. When an epidemic of plague starts, all have to leave their homes and cities. In the same way we should now give up politics and not return to it until it becomes fit for us.<sup>24</sup>

In contrast, JP's former secretary, Sri Sachchidanand, thought that JP's mistake was in leaving modern politics during the 1950s to join Vinoba's movement.<sup>25</sup> In saying this Sachchidanand was not downplaying the significance of gramdan. On the contrary he believed it was a most important experiment. However, he thought that JP's talents would have been employed better in developing a "political" opposition to the Congress. Indeed JP's departure from the modern political scene left something of a vacuum. It enabled power to be increasingly centralised within the Congress and also forced the Congress to assume greater responsibility for power. More importantly, in leaving aside politics JP left aside the task of organising the people.

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid, pp.146 - 148.

<sup>25</sup> Interview conducted by myself, 4 October 1985 at Sri Sachchidanand's home, 13-4 Karkasbagh Colony, Patna.



Vinoba seemed to associate organisation with hierarchy and power which he believed diverted attention away from his cause of spirituality. However, this does not mean that he was totally opposed to organisation in people's lives. He envisaged gram swarajya as the ideal encompassing the whole of people's lives releasing them from their dependence on government. But Vinoba seemed to think that it might come about spontaneously as a result of "total revolution", that is "total revolution" as he saw it - carried out along the lines of the constructive programme with which he was experimenting. Vinoba believed that only with such a socio-economic constructive programme of social change could people's strength be aroused. It was morality not organisation that he stressed. It became apparent to JP though that organisation also needed to be emphasised. As he explained, from his prison cell during the Emergency:

Here was I trying to widen the horizons of our democracy. Trying to do it mainly by involving the people more intimately and continuously in the processes of democracy. This in two ways: One by creating some kind of machinery with the people in the setting up of candidates. Two, by providing a machinery - the same machinery as in One above would have done - through which the people could keep a watch on their representatives and demand good and honest performance from them.<sup>26</sup>

This was a departure from Vinoba for here was JP saying that it was necessary to make politics fit for the people, not as Vinoba had advised to leave it until it was no more. Vinoba anticipated that government authority would decline eventually and people's authority would be established instead. However, JP thought this was no longer possible as the politics of the centre seemed to be getting stronger not weaker. Kanti Shah suggested that this does not mean that JP lost his course for the 20 years that he was with Vinoba for during that time he had always emphasised gram swarajya.<sup>27</sup> Indeed JP said, in December 1978:

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<sup>26</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, Prison Diary, p.1.

<sup>27</sup> Shah, Vinoba, p.143.

In my concept of total revolution, the idea of gram swarajya was, and is still implied. In my view, the objective of total revolution and of sarvodaya is one and the same. There may be some procedural differences even that would be in respect of emphasis only. The word "revolution" is indicative of fundamental change only; hence the term "total revolution" is more attractive.<sup>28</sup>

Thus he did not disregard his previous 20 years so much as he built on that experience. JP believed in a two-pronged approach; like Vinoba he was concerned to raise a new system from the ground but simultaneously JP was concerned to raze the old system to the ground too.

This two-pronged approach involved a combination of immediate and ultimate goals, that is, of good government and self-government, a combination which presented many contradictions. On the one hand, it was trying to make the existing political system more representative, and on the other it was trying to erode it. The existing system that JP wanted to erode consisted of parties, government, parliament and the bureaucracy, and voting. JP did not seem to have wanted to erode it all, only that which was irrelevant to the electorate. He seemed to have assumed the continuation of the parliaments at both the state and national levels. What he wanted was a change in character of the representatives. He wanted them to be people's representatives, not party representatives. JP did not think that parties were the appropriate bodies to choose representatives. He preferred the idea of people directly involved in the selection process and subsequent direction of the representative's policies. Under the party system JP maintained that the people's role was limited to voting, and that even the exercise of their vote was irrelevant for they had no control over the policies and behaviour of their representatives once elected. He believed that the putting forward of people's candidates to a stand against party

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

candidates would give the electorate a real choice and make the exercise of their voting relevant. Yet, presumably, as people increasingly voted for people's candidates over party candidates, the role of the parties would decline to such an extent that they would no longer put forward candidates. Only people's candidates would stand - one in each electorate, making the vote a mere formality. Perhaps the next step would be to do away with the vote, for the elected representative would not be controlled through the ballot box but by people through the delegate's council. Although JP did not appear to actually suggest this, this would seem to be the logical extension of JP's ideas. The vote demonstrates on the one hand how it could be made into a useful tool of democracy and at the same time gradually rendered irrelevant.

JP's attitude towards the political parties is more difficult to rationalise. He advocated a partyless democracy and demanded that party politics be kept out of the Lok Samiti and CYSV. He regarded CYSV members as revolutionaries and they were required not to hold membership with any party or political wing of their trade union or student movement. The Lok Samiti rules were not so strict. Ordinary party members could belong to Lok Samiti but party office holders could not. In addition, those members of Lok Samiti who were also members of political parties could not hold any Lok Samiti office or be representatives of people's committees at higher levels. This was done to prevent party politics from entering people's committees. It may seem contradictory to allow even ordinary party members to join Lok Samiti but perhaps JP regarded this as a way to show those ordinary party members that there was an alternative to party politics while making it very clear that it was quite separate from party politics. When JP, himself, left politics to join the bhoodan movement in the 1950s, he did not immediately resign completely from the CSP. He only refused any office. It was later when he resigned from the party and much later when he

suggested that he had been wrong in ever having given the Congress Socialist movement the name and a structure of a party.<sup>29</sup> Given JP's background and the evolution of his thinking one can understand his sympathy with ordinary party members who tried to seek an alternative political way.

However, JP's attitude towards the party system becomes even more complex when one tries to evaluate what he did in practice with regard to his role in ousting Mrs Gandhi's government, JP openly supported the defeat of Mrs Gandhi and the victory of the Janata Party. He was never under any illusion that the Janata party was the ultimate alternative to the Congress(I) and he always maintained the need to continue work outside the party system and build people's committees from below. Yet he allowed himself to be identified with Janata and thus with the party system. JP was concerned to purge the party system of the corruption that Congress(I) appeared to represent. He wanted to see the promise of good government in its stead. While JP may have been able to rationalise his involvement and stay aloof from party politics the campaign was geared towards the selection of one party over another. The campaign to rid government of Mrs Gandhi became very personalised, targeted against Mrs Gandhi. This would seem to have gone against JP's ideas yet he was at the forefront of the campaign.

After the Janata victory JP stepped back out of parliamentary party politics and concentrated on the grass roots level. It is not clear just what he hoped to achieve or what he hoped would be achieved in the post-election period. Perhaps the main aim was to demonstrate to the parties the potential power of the people and thus persuade them of their need to be more accountable to their

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<sup>29</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Towards Reconstructing the Polity", based on an inaugural address to all India Radical Humanist Association Conference, Calcutta, December 1973, published in Voluntary Action, XVI (March-June 1974) p.3.

electorate. Perhaps also JP saw it as an issue around which to generate the psychological force he saw as necessary to challenge the people to change themselves and their situation. Certainly it had served as an important rallying point and it had presented a challenge to JP to determine what alternatives he had in mind and how he was going to achieve them but as he himself acknowledged, the momentum passed. It served also to demonstrate the potential of the people but at the same time demonstrated the limitations of the people's role under the prevailing system, that is, that the people's role did not go beyond the election. It suggested that if sustained action to raise awareness and bring about change is to be undertaken, then it really needs to be undertaken at the local level where it can be consolidated.

However, Sachchidanand's point about politics needing someone such as JP is pertinent. JP's re-entry into politics was so fast and events moved so quickly with the disaffected opposition groups who had been in disarray for so long finally having a cause around which they could unite. They overwhelmed the JP movement, so although JP never let go of sarvodaya the fact was that the sarvodaya philosophy did not represent any tangible core of the movement. Rather it was more of an agitational movement that tended to be preoccupied with immediate economic and political issues. The strength of the movement actually evolved around an anti-Congress campaign. Thus it had no sound base for it failed to attract the masses. The movement was not seeking so much the uplift of all as the ousting of the Congress. In fact there was considerable resistance within the movement against mobilising the masses, both peasants and workers.<sup>30</sup> Programmes were not geared towards solving the problems of the poor. Instead they were concerned with corruption, adequate vocational training at the tertiary level and the dissolution of the Assembly. Most of the programmes were issue-oriented directed against particular grievances

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<sup>30</sup> Shah, Protest Movements, p.128.

involving the fixing of prices on essential commodities and protesting against taxes. These issues interested the students far more than the sarvodaya ideals, the relevance of which they failed to understand. As for the masses, there was some initial support for the movement in regard to causes such as land reform and lower prices but their sympathy was soon lost because JP's movement came to be dominated by power politics.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

There are a number of lessons that can be drawn out of the JP movement. It demonstrated the difficulty of trying to reconcile JP's ultimate goal of "total revolution" or voluntarist politics with the immediate modern political concerns, in this case, displacing Mrs Gandhi's government. In practical terms the JP movement was trying to mobilise disaggregated grass roots groups at the strong, centralised macro-political level. but it lacked a strong organisational base and a well-trained cadre who were able to prepare a base that would be capable of resisting the compulsions of political opportunism that operated in the current structure. The Janata party may have meant people's party but it was actually a very limited party consisting basically of urban upper and middle classes, landlords and neo-rich farmers, whose main concern was to capture political power. The Janata period demonstrated the inability of the current parliamentary system to bring about any real social change. What needs to be recognised is that the Bihar movement was not an attempt to apply JP's voluntarist idiom, rather it was an attempt to confront the prevailing modern political situation.

JP's ideal system focused on decentralised grass roots groups who would gradually strengthen, extending horizontally - to build up solidarity - and

vertically - in order to actively participate in the wider political field. However JP did not see this as occurring spontaneously, and he recognised the need for some structure and organisation through which people at the grass roots could be educated to take on the responsibilities that lokniti entailed. He thought that there was a role for trained cadres to educate and mobilise people to this end. The CYSV was launched with this role in mind. Moreover, he believed that to be effective the local groups needed some sort of operational guidelines, which would provide stability as well as facilitate their communications with each other, thus strengthening each others' existence by sharing experiences, resources and expertise, and generally supporting each other. Lok Samiti was promoted as the type of structure that might provide an environment conducive to the nurturing of lokniti. The Lok Samiti model was that of an inverted pyramid, so the idea was to ensure that power was not only vested with the people but that it remained with the people. The local lok samitis were to be largely self-reliant, responsible, for example, for their own funding. It was not a bureaucratic structure. Rather, JP envisaged that it would be a continuing process, in which ongoing constructive work would be essential. People would be educated and involved through constructive work, thereby ensuring that Lok Samiti did not become removed from their situation. At the same time JP did not suggest that this structure would operate in isolation from other forces. JP, himself, was always interested in networking, forming coalitions to further community links and strengthen the grass roots position. In addition, JP understood that any efforts in the direction of lokniti still had to contend with the prevailing rajniti structure. It could not be ignored. Power could be devolved only gradually and this process would require a vigilant role by the peoples' committees. The consequent involvement in the dominant political sphere was clearly a contradictory position. However, JP believed that if a total approach was adopted towards achieving lokniti then these contradictions

would be minimised, as it would result in a gradual restructuring of the prevailing modern economic, political and social framework into a flexible model able to respond to prevailing needs and circumstances.

To assess the relevance of JP's loknniti type ideals it is necessary to examine them in the context in which JP envisaged them occurring, that is, extra-constitutionally, at the grass roots level. Thus it may be determined as to the extent that his ideas converge with the ideas by which voluntary organisations active in this field operate. The following chapters seek to establish this convergence, although before they are introduced into the text, the next chapter, Chapter Four, is concerned to set the scene in which they operate.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### BIHAR AND WEST BENGAL BACKGROUND

In exploring the voluntarist political ideas of Jayaprakash Narayan and the relevance of these ideas to four organisations actively working towards lokniti, this thesis focuses on two neighbouring states, Bihar and West Bengal. This chapter is basically one of background information to set the scene. It reviews the prevailing political order in these states. They are based on the modern political idiom but some traditional idiom type influences are clearly present. Essentially they are rajniti in character. The British legacy is looked at first. Both states shared this history. Then the two states are dealt with separately having regard to the particular characteristics and experiences of each, especially the effect of their respective traditional idioms on the modern one.

#### I. BRITISH LEGACY

The dislocation suffered by modern India's states of Bihar and West Bengal under the British was, perhaps, greater than anywhere else in India for they were a part of the British administrative province of Bengal, which came under European influence half a century before the rest of India. As a result it suffered most from the effects of British rule for it was there that the foreign masters experimented most with fundamental social and economic changes based on the notion of extraction. After all the British origins in India were commercial, affecting the British administrative approach accordingly. The East India company's commercial policy ensured the production of raw materials in India for British industry, and the consumption of British manufactured goods in

India. Thus they boosted the production of raw materials with the establishment of indigo, jute and cotton plantations.

Bengal was well suited to both the task of production and market for it supported a large population with the rich alluvial soils of the North and South Bihar plains on either side of the Ganga and (what is now) West Bengal's fertile deltaic expanse into which the Ganga flows. The new centres of production in British Bengal were linked up with Calcutta, which was developed primarily as a port of export. It was a centre of commerce and industry, with, for example, cotton textile and jute manufacturing. This new industrial stimulation transformed the social structure in Bengal enormously and Calcutta became a giant metropolitan agglomeration recognised today as the seventh largest in the world.<sup>1</sup>

Beyond Calcutta, however, the rest of Bengal was left relatively underdeveloped with limited transport and other infrastructure. The urbanisation rate was very low. Meanwhile traditional manufacturing in the Bengali hinterland was restricted and crushed by various measures and internal duties. These were imposed by the British and prevented the flow of Indian goods within the country itself. On the other hand British goods enjoyed free entry. Consequently the Indian textile industry collapsed, displacing vast numbers of weavers and other artisans. This process was particularly rapid in British Bengal whereas other areas were affected more gradually as the British expanded and the railways developed. It led to both the monetisation and impoverishment of the villages as they became increasingly dependent on the wider economy, largely losing their self-sufficient character and suffering an overall drain from the villages through this unequal exchange that the British promoted.

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<sup>1</sup> A Das, "Development Blockage and Unemployment in West Bengal", in D Bhattacharyya (ed), Focus on West Bengal (Calcutta: Samatit Prakashan, 1972), p.20.

Also at this time the whole nature of agriculture was changed by the British in Bengal as they introduced property rights in land with the Cornwallis Permanent Settlement, 1773. Basically this was an administrative measure designed as a source of revenue to ensure the punctual receipt of land revenue. At the same time it conformed with the prevailing Whig philosophy that the State's role was to administer justice by securing the interests of private property and consequently it ensured that there was a class of loyal landholders. So the British conferred title on the zamindars, who had been responsible for collecting taxes over particular areas since the Mughal times. The zamindars were given only circumscribed proprietary rights for theoretically they were not allowed to dispossess the primary producers. Thus their rights were not so much in land but rather the revenue from the land. They were expected to act as "improving landlords" so as to maximise their capital. However, with neither effective control of the means of production or the production process and faced with heavy demands by the British revenue collection, many zamindars actually divided their land and sold it. The new land-owners tended to be urban-based Bengali elite, the bhadralok, who further drained capital from the countryside and were not concerned with reinvesting their profits.

Consequently effective control of the land, labour and capital or credit on the rural scene was left in the hands of local power-holders, zotdars, that is, village headmen, and substantial peasants. It was the zotdars who took advantage of the rise of international trade as they gained access to greater credit and commodity markets, commercialising Bengali agriculture.

The position of the peasants was completely changed as the settlement "struck at the whole Indian conception of a cooperative group social structure",<sup>2</sup> which is the basis of any idea of lokniti. Superior rights to land were granted to non-cultivators, whose main business was to collect land revenue for the British, so it is not surprising that agrarian relations were structured in their favour. The security of the tenants was no longer ensured by custom, rather by the settlement, which required written documentation of which the peasant tended to be ignorant. Moreover, the traditional taxes paid by the plattas had been fixed by custom at a fairly constant level, that is, a fixed portion of their produce. This system was conducive to the variable nature of agricultural production, for in lean years whilst the proportion payable might remain the same, the actual amount payable would be less than in bumper years. However after Permanent Settlement the ground rents were likely to be changed at will by the landlords. For their part the zamindars were required to pay cash revenue, regulated according to scales established in the Permanent Settlement, and they faced penalties for late or non-payment of this revenue. The demand for cash rents of course required the sale of grain to raise cash thus encouraging the process of monetisation at the village level. The ramifications of this process were immense. For example Das records that in the village of Changel better rates for the sale of grain could be obtained from a market village a few kilometers away.<sup>3</sup> This led to a number of families acquiring bullock carts which meant that they needed new bullocks as the local bullocks were not suitable. The carts required better wheel craft than the local blacksmith cum carpenter could produce thus resulting in a drain of resources away from the local village economy.

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<sup>2</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, The Discovery of India (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1965), p.304.

<sup>3</sup> Arvind N Das, "Changel: Three Centuries of an Indian Village," Journal of Peasant Studies, vol.15 (1987), p.17.

Permanent Settlement also led to a change in prevalent land use patterns with the acquisition of waste lands traditionally used for customary grazing as well as other activities such as salt and soap making according to soil types etc. Thus these occupations were closed to those who had traditionally undertaken them. Furthermore it meant a decline in the local availability of meat and other animal products, salt, soap etc so that they had to be imported into the village, and became more expensive. The new usage of the lands often contributed further to this overall impoverishment. In Changel, for instance, absentee landlords grew mangos for export from the village. Thus mangos which had hitherto been a free food, in season, acquired exchange value. Moreover the growing of mangos was at the expense of other traditionally available trees such as bamboo which had been an important local building material. Consequently the cost of building increased.<sup>4</sup>

Thus the effects of Permanent Settlement at the village level were far reaching. However, the British found that as a revenue raiser the system was not as advantageous as they had hoped. Therefore it was never applied with such extreme rigour elsewhere in India. The Bengali society though was characterised by "depeasantisation" as political and economic power on the rural scene passed to the zotdars. "Depeasantisation" involved a three-fold process: a rise in rural indebtedness; extension of sharecropping and labouring; and the escalation of land transfers, all of which are inter-related. The land transfers meant greater insecurity for the tenants - an insecurity that was characterised by increased indebtedness, and a general change in relationships between those who held the land and those who worked it with greater emphasis on sharecropping and agricultural labour rather than peasants; this meant a much greater dependence by the sharecroppers and labourers on the land-owners. A sharecropper was a tenant farmer who worked for himself and paid a share of

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.16.

his crop as rental. Theoretically the sharecropper held a secure title but in practice the sharecropper's status was unprotected as the relationship between the sharecropper and land-owners was based on submission. The landlords held the balance of social and economic power and could replace one sharecropper with another, or even substitute wage labour.<sup>5</sup> The agricultural labourer's situation was also unequal. Agricultural labourers were often indebted to the land-owners who subsequently demanded total obedience and were prepared to use whatever means of intimidation were necessary to ensure it. This situation has continued.<sup>6</sup> In general tensions have been further fuelled by the fact that there seemed to be less and less work available, and what there was paid less than before.<sup>7</sup> It is this inequality of power that is true essence of rajniti; and it was against this background that the modern political structure was imposed.

## II. BIHAR

Bihar was created as a political unit in 1912 by the British. It is now a landlocked state of about 174,083 square kilometers, which is about 5.71% of the total area of the Indian union.<sup>8</sup> Geographically it is divided into: the Gangetic plains of the North through which the Ganga flows from East to West dividing the North Bihar Plain from the South Bihar Plain; and the highlands of

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<sup>5</sup> The Land Reform Amendment Act 1970 (West Bengal) was enacted with the intention of securing the interests of the bargadar or sharecropper seeking to make the sharecroppers' rights legally enforceable but generally sharecroppers' titles were not registered and therefore not protected. At law ten years tenancy sufficed instead of registration but the inequality between the bargadars and landlords effectively rendered the legislation otiose.

<sup>6</sup> cf Prasad, Rural Violence in India (Varansi: Gandhian Institute of Studies, 1985), especially Chapter Three, detailing social, economic and sexual intimidation and even murder.

<sup>7</sup> cf Willem Van Schendel and Aminul Haque Faraizi, Rural Labourers in Bengal 1880-1980 (Rotterdam: Casp 12), 1984.

<sup>8</sup> Ram Chandra Prasad, Bihar (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1983), p.2.

the Chota Nagpur Plateau in the South. The North Bihar plain is very fertile and extensive, stretching up to the foothills of the Himalayas. The South Bihar Plain is narrower and the depth of alluvium is thinner. This area becomes quite hilly and barren. There is flooding on both plains. Chota Nagpur has suffered from considerable deforestation. It has scanty rainfall, poor irrigation and is subject to droughts. On the other hand, Chota Nagpur is the richest mineral belt in India. It contains the world's largest resources of mica, as well as large quantities of copper, bauxite and limestone. Most of the mineralised areas are forest covered and relatively remote. There are many unexplored reserves.

From the point of view of mineral wealth Bihar is the richest state in India, producing 41% of the nation's net weight in mineral production and achieving just over 30% of its value.<sup>9</sup> The proximity of mineral wealth has resulted in the establishment of a number of giant capital-intensive complexes, including the Tata Iron and Steel Company which boasts the largest steel plant in India at Sakchi, Singhbhum district. There are some engineering projects such as the Heavy Machine Building Plant which produces equipment for the iron and steel industries. In addition Bihar has a number of non-metallic industries such as cement, fertiliser and chemical plants.

However, it is agriculture that is central to Bihar's economy with more than 80% of the population drawing sustenance from it.<sup>10</sup> Clearly the distribution of rights in land is very important to the economic system, and helps to determine and reflect the structure of power in the society. About half of those dependent on agriculture are cultivators,<sup>11</sup> amongst whom the most important land-owning castes are the former zamindars, mainly from the Brahman, Rajput

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p.96

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p.112.

<sup>11</sup> Ghanshyam Shah, Protest Movements in Two Indian States, (New Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1977), p.68.

and Bhumihar castes. Under them are various categories of tenants and agricultural labourers and farm servants. Among the tenants are those permanent tenants who, after the abolition of the zamindar system emerged as a new category of land-owners and came to dominate the contemporary political scene along with the former zamindars. These are Yadava and Kurmi castes. Land-ownership tends to be concentrated with about five and a half percent of land-owning households owning 33% of the land.<sup>12</sup> Just over 70% of the total cultivating households have less than five acres of land each.<sup>13</sup>

The other half directly engaged in agriculture are labourers although the numbers of agricultural labourers is swelling as increasing numbers of small cultivators are forced to sell their land.<sup>14</sup> The labourers include both sharecroppers and agricultural labourers although there is increasing reliance on the direct hiring of labour especially since the Green Revolution which changed the nature of agriculture and resulted in the eviction of many sharecroppers who had neither the documentation nor the economic resources to assert their legal rights. Labourers' wages are generally below the fixed statutory minimum and demands for increased wages and more favourable conditions of work are generally taken by the land-owning castes as threats to the entire framework of the labourers' dependence and the landlords' authority. Thus such claims often are met with brutal suppression by the land-owners.<sup>15</sup> Moreover the agricultural system is such that the agricultural labourers tend not to be employed for the whole year. Consequently, the landless labourers tend to be impoverished. Bihar is very poor in terms of income distribution with almost 75% of the population below the poverty line.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the Bihari

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> People's Union for Democratic Rights, "Bihar Behind the Curtain", A R Desai (ed), Democratic Rights in India, vol.I (Bombay Popular Prakashan, 1986), p.441.



agricultural scene is characterised by an informal system of bondage, which is forced on poor peasants who need to take consumption loans from larger land-holders. Generally these loans far exceed the poor peasants' assets and thus the creditors are able to control the debtors through tied or bonded labour.<sup>17</sup> So "for all practical purposes they (the money-lenders cum large land-holders) are the law in their areas."<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile the number of landless has been growing.

It was in this environment that Vinoba launched his bhoodan and gramdan campaigns, hoping to achieve voluntary based land reforms. Generally, however, those controlling the land were not interested in surrendering it, nor were there any modern political government initiatives to curtail the problem. Rather there has been a failure on the part of the state government to effectively implement agrarian reforms and provide for a more equitable distribution of land or change in the traditional agricultural structure. Indeed the passing of modern land reform legislation involved long, difficult legal and political struggles. For example land ceilings bills were mooted for many years before legislation was finally enacted in Bihar in 1961. These years gave traditional large land-holders time to devise ways to circumvent legislation through fictitious transfers. Also it made the position of long occupancy tenants very insecure as many land-holders evicted them before their rights could be entrenched at law. In spite of the enactment of modern land reform legislation, the government took very little action to implement it. This is partly because it presented an immense administrative undertaking, particularly in view of the fact that there is no up to date survey of land holdings. However it is also a fact that those in political power have vested interests in maintaining the status quo.

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<sup>16</sup> R C Prasad, Bihar, p.114.

<sup>17</sup> Pradhan H Prasad, "Semi-Feudalism: The Basic Constraint of Indian Agriculture," A N Das & V Nilakant (ed.s) Agrarian Relations in India (New Delhi: Manohar, 1979), p.35.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.36.

Only a small proportion of Bihar's population live in the towns (about ten per cent)<sup>19</sup> but it is the third most densely populated state in India.<sup>20</sup> It has 402 people per square kilometer and the national average is 221.<sup>21</sup> The traditional social structure is predominantly (80%) Hindu.<sup>22</sup> In conventional varna categories they can be divided hierarchically into upper, middle, lower and Scheduled castes. The upper or forward castes include the Brahmans, Bhumihars, Rajputs, Kayasthas and Banias, who collectively comprise about 13-1/2% of the population. The Brahmans, Bhumihars and Rajputs are all major land-owning castes. The Brahmans are socially and ritually the most superior but throughout this century the Bhumihars have sought to assert their superiority by reading the Vedas and performing religious rituals unaided by the Brahmans.<sup>23</sup> The Kayasthas and Banias are the important caste groups in the towns and cities. The Kayasthas are the most advanced caste educationally and are prominent in all modern professional occupations, whereas the Banias predominate in trade and commerce.

The major middle castes are the Kurmis, Yadavas and Koiris who make up about 18-1/2% of the population<sup>24</sup> and are often ascribed the title "backward castes" together with the lower castes. The middle castes are far behind the

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<sup>19</sup> This statistic and the ones that follow were taken from the Times of India's Directory and Year Book 1982 (Bombay: Times of India Press, 1982), p.272. The population density figures were based on the 1981 census.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> R C Prasad, Bihar, p.24.

<sup>24</sup> H W Blair, "Ethnicity and Democratic Politics in India", Comparative Politics, 5 (1972): 111. Except with respect to the data relating to Scheduled castes and tribes and to the Muslims these figures are based on 1931 census figures as subsequent census have not reported caste information. However, Blair believes that with some caution the figures may still be used as it is such a largely rural population, which means that large numbers of migrants are unlikely to distort the balance. Moreover, figures relating to Harijans have remained fairly consistent over time.

upper castes in terms of education. Nevertheless they are important land-owning castes in Northern Bihar, where they were formerly tenants of the zamindars. The Yadavas' hereditary occupation is that of herdsmen. Numerically they are the largest single caste in Bihar with about 11% of the population.<sup>25</sup> The Koiris traditionally are agriculturalists particularly skilled in growing special crops such as tobacco and opium rather than staple crops. The Kurmis are purely cultivating castes.

The lower castes comprise about 32% of the population, the Scheduled castes about 14%. The Muslims make up about 12-1/2% and the Scheduled tribes about nine per cent.<sup>26</sup> They form the majority of the population but they do not have much power within the prevailing political order.

The upper and middle castes are the most significant on the modern political scene. Modern politics was slow to emerge within the Bihari society for it tended to be dominated by the bhadralok, the Bengali elite. After the separation of Bihar from British Bengal it was the Kayastha caste who entered modern politics in the most advantageous position, being the most educated caste. The Brahmans quickly recognised education as the path to advancement, and with falling agricultural prices these traditional land-holders sought to enter the tertiary and professional sectors, competing with the Kayasthas for government positions. Meanwhile the other upper castes were able to consolidate their land-holdings in the rural areas. Also some sections of the middle castes who were larger tenants were able to convert their tenancies into ownership. This all led to a rising of caste consciousness, especially amongst the upper castes as they became politically mobilised and gradually aimed to further advance themselves through education in order to compete for their share of power.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

After independence the middle castes began to assert themselves in the dominant power structure. The middle castes succeeded in defeating the Congress party in 1967. On the one hand opportunities presented themselves with the penetration of government institutions and local government, firstly through the community development programme and later through panchayat raj. This gave motivated castes both a channel to air their grievances, and a means to enhance their political and economic power through their participation in local government and their consequent access to economic resources through the power to issue government permits or grant government contracts etc. On the other hand post independence India also brought greater opportunities for the raising of consciousness again with the establishment of government institutions as well as the touring of politicians at election time and the promise of legislative reforms towards a more equitable social and economic structure thus raising expectations.

As their political awareness increased, the middle castes perceived the state government as neglecting their welfare. For example as land-owning castes they felt their traditional positions were threatened by proposed and actual state government enactment of land reforms for a more equitable distribution of land and a change in the agricultural structure. At the same time the state government's failure to effectively implement such reforms ensured the continued dominance of the upper castes, curbing their own advancement. Meanwhile, the union government was seen to be advancing the position of lower castes by their "scheduling" in order to ensure safeguards and benefits to promote their position in society. This was carried out at the union level but extended to the state levels, and included special favours in education, government, employment and political representation. It was a system of

reverse or protective discrimination, and caused anxieties amongst the middle castes that their own situation might be adversely affected by such policies. Thus they sought to advance their own position in modern government electoral politics, and claimed similar preferential treatment by identifying themselves as "backward" castes, while exercising their social and economic power at the local level to try and maintain the subservience of the lower castes. This resulted in a very volatile political environment as the traditional and modern idioms came together producing a rajniti scenario.

However, the middle castes' assertion on the political scene did not make for stable politics in Bihar. In the five years following the 1967 defeat of Congress, a total of nine governments were formed, seven of which were led by men from the backward castes. Congress was returned in 1972. With the support of Mrs Gandhi's Emergency it remained in power until 1977 when the middle castes lent their support to Janata, which won office. The Janata government was headed by Chief Minister Thakur, a backward caste leader.

The Janata took office at both the national level and the state level in Bihar. At the central level it raised the issue of Reservation, reserving a new bloc of jobs and tertiary education positions for other "backward" castes in addition to those places already reserved for Scheduled castes and tribes. The primary beneficiaries of this move were the middle castes, especially the Yadavas and Kurmis. It made very little difference to the lower castes and indeed the Scheduled castes and tribes, most of whom were illiterate and not in a position to compete for the vacancies. Thus the decision to reserve 26% of the vacancies to the backward castes was not one of altruism to help the underprivileged. Rather it was a recognition of the considerable power commanded by these so-called backward castes.

However, Thakur's decision raised fresh controversy from the forward castes who were disturbed by the prospect of half the vacancies being closed to them. It was argued that more than 50% of the backward castes, consisting of the Yadavas and Kurmis, were richer than the upper caste people.<sup>27</sup> As a result Thakur announced modifications to the Reservations policy on 21 March 1978. Reservation was not to affect promotions, only appointments and only those whose income was less than one thousand rupees per month would be entitled to benefit. Nevertheless the unrest continued. Both the upper and middle castes were dissatisfied. The atmosphere on university and college campuses where the students were primarily upper caste was explosive.<sup>28</sup> The situation deteriorated to such an extent that on 8 April 1978 the Bihar government decided to close all the universities and colleges until 23 April 1978. Examinations had to be postponed and students were asked to vacate their hostels. Then agitation spread beyond the campuses with buses being overturned and trains being brought to a halt. Atrocities against Harijans continued. Although agitations began to die down there was a further outbreak of violence in November, after the Chief Minister announced a revision of the Reservation formula. This time 20% of vacancies were to be reserved for backward castes and three per cent each for women and economically backward communities.

Clearly Bihar's modern political idiom of parliamentary politics was strongly influenced by the persistence of feudal social relations dominated by the upper and middle castes whose attention focused on their competing power struggle which did not make for a stable modern polity. The state governments in Bihar in independent India came and went in quick succession, seeming to avoid any real attempt at performance through legislation, operating instead through

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<sup>27</sup> Blair, "Ethnicity and Democratic Politics", p.111.

<sup>28</sup> Shah, Protest Movements, pp.74-76.

ordinances. Between 1967 and 1980 the most number of days that the Bihar Assembly sat in any one year was 64, in 1973. In 1981 there were 60 ordinances that had operated for more than a decade.<sup>29</sup>

The upper and middle castes were concerned with consolidating their power within the modern political idiom. This was demonstrated by the reaction over the Reservation issue, and by the use of private armies whose functioning is unrestrained and whose actions are often assisted by the police.<sup>30</sup> There have been a series of violent onslaughts against Harijans, sharecroppers and landless labourers. In most cases the attackers were the middle caste Yadvas and Kurmis, who had been enraged by the growing organisation and assertion of political and economic rights by Harijans, such as demands for higher wages, occupancy rights, strikes etc.<sup>31</sup> Information about the number and extent of such incidents was not reliable, and the lack of information was a part of the scheme of repression.<sup>32</sup> One such incident occurred on 6 May 1982 in Jehanabad Gaya, where an armed struggle took place between landlords and landless labourers after the latter demanded higher wages in accordance with the minimum wages act.<sup>33</sup> Generally the landed castes were supported by the police against whom many excesses were alleged; however, the state government refused to allow independent enquiries as it claimed that this would demoralise the force.<sup>34</sup> The scene presented was very much one of rajniti characterised by exploitation and violence. It was this scene that JP wanted to change by raising the poorest elements, in particular the Scheduled castes and tribes, through lokniti type processes. So it was against this background that he

<sup>29</sup> "60 Ordinances Operating in Bihar", The Statesman (Weekly 14.3.1981), p.13.

<sup>30</sup> PUDR, "Bihar Behind the Curtain", p.439.

<sup>31</sup> D L Sheth, "Politics of Caste Conflict", Seminar, 233 (1979): 30.

<sup>32</sup> PUDR "Bihar Behind the Curtain", pp.440-441.

<sup>33</sup> "Rural Situation in Bihar Explosive", The Statesman (Weekly) 15 May 1982, p.5.

<sup>34</sup> "The Threat in Bihar", The Statesman (Weekly), 14 November 1985, p.8

launched the Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini and Lok Samiti, directing their attention to this end. Some of the work that these organisations have undertaken will be studied in the next chapter.

### III. WEST BENGAL

The modern state of West Bengal is the Western portion of the larger Bengal which was partitioned at independence. Many problems have developed within West Bengal as a result of partition. Firstly the geographical distortions have created many difficulties in administering the state as a unified whole. West Bengal consists of three distinct portions. The largest area is in the South, and the smallest in the middle. Each portion is connected only by a narrow neck of land. The narrowest neck connects the North and middle portions and is a particularly sensitive strategic concern for the Indian nation as it is bordered by Nepal on the one side and Bangladesh on the other. The other major problem with which West Bengal has been confronted by its partition from East Bengal has been the influx of refugees immediately after partition, and secondly there was a large influx during and after the civil war that culminated in the formation of Bangladesh.

West Bengal is generally a flat alluvial plain, much of which is part of the delta of the River Ganga. However, the far North is mountainous, where there is a wide variety of minerals but little of any significant value. It is the second most densely populated state with 614 people per square kilometer.<sup>35</sup> The alluvial plains support a large agricultural population. However, West Bengal also has a comparatively large urban population of just under 25% compared with an all India average of about 20%.<sup>36</sup> The urban population is centred around

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<sup>35</sup> Times of India's Directory and Year Book 1982, p.272.



Calcutta, which was established by the British as an important commercial and administrative centre. It served as the capital of British India until 1905 when the British shifted to Delhi. The British also developed many industries there and it was an important port for the rest of British Bengal, including modern day Bihar, which continues to serve as its hinterland. It is to Calcutta where most people in rural Bihar and Orissa flock nowadays when they can no longer make a living from the land. Thus Calcutta is a relatively cosmopolitan city, which is reinforced by the fact that most of the business people are non-Bengalis.

The traditional Bengali society is different from that in Bihar. It is from Bengal that members of the elite group, the bhadralok are drawn.<sup>37</sup> The bhadralok represent a status group rather than a class or caste, and are characterised by their orientation towards education, intellectual and literary pursuits. Thus they have provided a pool of social and economic leadership. Their numbers are drawn mainly from the Brahmans and two other castes: Vaidya (physicians) and Kayastha (writers). The Brahmans were the principal land-holding caste in Bengal but they never enjoyed the unchallenged ritual social status that they were afforded in the rest of India. The Vaidya and Kayastha were ritually inferior to the Brahmans but had considerable economic and social status. Together these three castes always enjoyed a privileged position in Bengali society.

They had a tradition of being drawn upon for the administrative core of successive Bengali Mogul governments because their mastery of foreign languages was always invaluable for the mediation between the foreign rulers and their subjects. Thus they became a class of collaborators which enabled

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> J H Bloomfield, Elite Conflict in a Plural Society, Twentieth Century Bengal (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

them to maintain a dominant and indispensable position that was strengthened under the British and they shared an attitude of superiority that distanced them from the Bengali masses. The lower castes demonstrated their resentment by lending their support to all other religious influences such as Buddhism and Islam. Under the British the bhadralok rose to a position of supremacy as they became a source of recruitment by the British for all non-British Indian colonial posts. They were able to take advantage of their position by buying up the old zamindari land-holdings. However it was in Calcutta, the capital of Bengal (and all British India) that the bhadralok actually established themselves, remitting their profits there. They developed the city as a centre of learning and the bhadralok classes were drawn to the city by opportunities in education, the public service, professions and by the general excitement associated with the intellectual fervour of the times.

The European influence brought many new ideas to the bhadralok, including science, social reform, philosophy, and Western education, generating a new intellectual awareness that manifested itself in the "Bengal Renaissance".<sup>38</sup> A number of prominent Bengali thinkers emerged including Ramakrishna, Rammohan Roy, Rabindranath Tagore<sup>39</sup> and M N Roy<sup>40</sup>. Rammohan Roy founded the Brahmo Samaj which sought to rationalise Hinduism in modern terms and attempted to reform a number of archaic social practices such as child marriage and sati. He defended the rights of women and promoted freedom of the press which he believed would help diffuse knowledge, liberating and improving the mind so as to ensure that the people would familiarise the

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<sup>38</sup> cf Atulchandra Gupta, Studies in the Bengal Renaissance (Calcutta: National Council of Education, Bengal, 1977); revised and enlarged edition edited by Jagannath Chakravorty. Also David Kopf, Bengal Regional Identity (Michigan: Asian Studies Center - Michigan State University, 1969).

<sup>39</sup> cf chapter 5.

<sup>40</sup> cf. chapter 1.

government with any errors and injustices it might be committing. Ramakrishna supported this outlook: "By the mind one is bound; by the mind one is freed".<sup>41</sup> Meanwhile the Bengali vernacular press developed in Calcutta and in many obscure places. Newspapers became common place. In 1905 there were fifty seven Bengali weeklies, only eighteen of which were from Calcutta.<sup>42</sup> The practice of community gatherings at which one person might read the paper to a large number was widespread. At the same time popular songs and dramas depicting exploitation developed throughout the countryside.<sup>43</sup> Also gymnastic clubs for physical education were established and used to promote a new consciousness. Thus new ideas were spread.

Consequently the Renaissance brought with it a new or modern political consciousness. Initially it was a very loyal consciousness supportive of British rule. The British, of course, were the link with the humanitarian and liberalism ideals that were being adopted. There was a faith in the "generosity of the English race" believing that the British would themselves "pave the path to freedom" for the Indians.<sup>44</sup> England was seen to provide shelter to all those who fled from persecution in their own countries. It was against this background that the Indian National Congress was founded and originally operated with the bhadralok playing a prominent role. The Indian National Congress was not established as a political party but as a gathering of leaders

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<sup>41</sup> Ramakrishna was advising the Brahmas to cultivate the liberating powers of the mind during one of his visits with Keshut Chunder Sen; cited in W M Theodore De Bary, Sources of Indian Tradition vol.II (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), p.90.

<sup>42</sup> Sumit Sarkar, The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-1908 (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1974) p.256.

<sup>43</sup> Reverend James Long in his testimony to the Indigo Commission appointed in Calcutta 1860; cited in John R McLane (ed) The Political Awakening in India (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1970), pp.30-36

<sup>44</sup> Rabindranath Tagore on his eightieth birthday, May 1941, cited in Jawaharlal Nehru, The Discovery of India (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1965), p. 321.

who represented various organisations, communities and regions. Basically they operated at an annual session held over Christmas although there were provincial conferences too. The annual gatherings were themselves important in promoting feelings of nationalism for they included representatives of all major communities throughout India although it was chiefly educated Indians who were involved. The bhadralok, in particular, played a very strong role.

Initially the Congress accepted the continuation of British rule but lobbied for greater Indian involvement in the administrative process believing that an Indian input into Indian questions would make for a more efficient administration. The proposed reforms were of a constitutional nature and would further their own position as educated Indians. However there developed "a painful feeling of disillusion" with the British as the bhadralok and other Western educated leaders "began increasingly to discover how easily those who accepted the highest truths of civilization disowned them with impunity whenever questions of national self-interest were involved."<sup>45</sup> The bhadralok were particularly hurt by Lord Curzon's proposed division of Bengal in the early 1900s. Basically this was for administrative purposes, although it was recognised that this would weaken the bhadralok's political stronghold as partition gave a majority to the Muslims in the Eastern sector and the Biharis and Oriyas in the West.<sup>46</sup> For their part the bhadralok saw it as an attack on their position.

The bhadralok's elite position of influence was a vulnerable one at that time. Many non-Bengali Indians had begun to receive English education, and thus competed for administrative positions. Moreover Lord Curzon's university bill (early 1900s) was designed to limit the number of Indians educated in English in order to curb the growth of nationalism; and the bhadralok saw themselves as

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p.322.

<sup>46</sup> cf Bloomfield, Elite Conflict, p.28.

the chief group who would be affected. Meanwhile the nineteenth century had also seen the increased sub-infeudation of bhadralok landed rent holdings which meant that their agricultural income declined correspondingly. Further they did not secure an economic base grounded in the control of capital through commerce. It was against the bhadralok code to sully themselves with trade. Rather it was the British and non-Bengali Indians, especially the Mawaris<sup>47</sup>, Gujaratis and Sindhis who accumulated capital and established themselves as a powerful commercial class. The bhadralok strongly opposed the proposed division of Bengal through press and public meetings, petitions and deputations.

Nevertheless Curzon's planned partition was implemented in 1905, and the bhadralok were stirred to find a more direct form of opposition, that of swadeshi. Swadeshi involved the boycott of the British manufactured goods and aimed to thus draw Britain's attention to the Bengali's grievances. Consequently it also promoted indigenous industries. For some though, such as Rabindranath Tagore and Bipinchandra Pal, the significance of the movement went beyond mere economic arguments. The self-help and self-reliance and passive resistance that it generated were part of a larger voluntarist idiom type of consciousness that it was hoped would emerge. Certainly it brought about debate on many practical issues through popular songs, newspapers and pamphlets, although the British clamped down on what was considered subversive press.<sup>48</sup> Swadeshi emphasised the use of the vernacular language and it involved some boycott of government schools and colleges and of the judiciary and administration. The aim was to make it impossible to administer the country although this was short lived. Also swadeshi promoted constructive

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<sup>47</sup> This term is used by Bengalis to denote a rich Hindi speaking businessman. It means to be from the land of the deserts.

<sup>48</sup> cf Sumit Sarkar, The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-1908 (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1973), p.268.

work in the villages through the establishment of the samitis, and through volunteer brigades, trade unions and gymnasiums.

Yet the vast majority of villagers remained indifferent to swadeshi.<sup>49</sup> It seemed "swadeshi-thought, so rich in other directions was indeed amazingly meagre and timid when it approached questions of landlord-peasant relationships."<sup>50</sup> The bhadralok were the vanguard of the movement, and many of them were landowners. A significant comment on the social character of the movement can be seen from early successes in the movement which were in boots, shoes and cigarettes.<sup>51</sup> However the movement was not confined to the bhadralok. Some barbers and servants played an active role withdrawing their services from those who continued to support British goods.<sup>52</sup> In general though, the involvement of the labour movement tended to be concentrated in the Calcutta industrial areas and the railways. Further, economically swadeshi was not such a success for really it "required patient work and technical knowhow rather than religious enthusiasm."<sup>53</sup> The Bengalis were entrepreneurially backward and held business in contempt. In fact whilst nationalism encouraged Bengali entrepreneurship, Kling records that business men were considered unpatriotic if they were purposeful.<sup>54</sup> The bhadralok took pride in the fact that the swadeshi movement ignored costs, prices, markets etc. Thus most of the new swadeshi industries failed. If swadeshi was to be viable it would have needed to revive traditional handicrafts and initiate modern industry in India. However with regard to cotton piece, for example, hardly a dent was made for the

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p.284.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p.333.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> cf Ibid., p. 316.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p.62.

<sup>54</sup> Blair B Kling, "Entrepreneurship and Regional Identity in Bengal," in Kopf, Bengal Regional Identity, p.81.

indigenous substitute was simply not available in quality or quantity and it was usually more expensive.<sup>55</sup>

In addition to the passive resistance of boycotts, the partitioning of Bengal in 1905 saw the bhadralok's militancy expressed in other ways with the emergence of revolutionary terrorism throughout the state. Acts included the derailing of the Lieutenant-Governor's train in December 1907, near Midnapore. Also a Mrs and Miss Kennedy were murdered at Muzaffarpur, 30 April 1908 when a bomb was thrown in the carriage that they were driving. Presumably the bomb was intended for the Judge of Muzaffarpur outside whose home the killing occurred. The terrorist activity gave the British justification to meet force with force. Thus they imposed a strict press; extended the secret police; imprisoned without trial and deported offenders; and so effectively suppressed the anti-partition as well as other political activity.

Bengal was reunited in 1912 but the British resolve to reduce bhadralok power was strengthened. Thus the British administrative capital was moved from Calcutta to Delhi, which severely affected general bhadralok opportunities. Moreover it struck at the Bengali ego which prided itself as representing the heart of cultural and intellectual awareness in India. Yet at the same time it provided greater opportunities for the bhadralok elite for the British expanded Indian participation in the administrative processes and it was this Western educated group that was most able to take advantage of these reforms.<sup>56</sup> Meanwhile the lower class, poor and semi-educated bhadralok who were not so Anglicised had to increasingly compete with non Bengalis for the teaching, clerical and subordinate government positions that they had previously

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<sup>55</sup> cf Sarkar, The Swadeshi Movement, p.147.

<sup>56</sup> Bloomfield, Elite Conflict, p.34.

monopolised.<sup>57</sup> The lower class bhadralok were generally ignored by the elite except when the elite needed "mass" support such as during swadeshi. They felt betrayed as the elite adopted a moderate position supporting the British administrative reforms.

Geographically isolated from the political centre and without any mass support base the bhadralok were unable to afford any real challenge to British rule. In addition it saw a shift in power within the nationalist movement from the Bengalis to the belt of Hindi speaking states which provided the core of Congress leadership particularly with the emergence of Gandhi. Gandhi's independence movement demanded loyalty and a strong central leadership leaving no room for the maintenance of a separate Bengali identity and his simplistic outlook seemed somewhat philistine.<sup>58</sup> However the lower class bhadralok were gradually attracted to Gandhi's leadership as both a means of struggle against the British and as a means to advance their own position politically. However, for the elite bhadralok the voluntarist style of satyagraha did not offer any exalted social and political role such as they thought they deserved. So it was with reluctance that the Bengal Congress Committee was persuaded to support Gandhi's nationalist leadership.

Other bhadralok rejected the Congress and were attracted instead to Marxism. In the wake of the Russian revolution it promised the overthrow of the British; but also Marxism assured them of a modern society in which intellectuals would enjoy a more prominent position; it denied the usefulness of traders and merchants; and it denigrated orthodox Hindu ideas that Gandhi's Congress seemed to promote.

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<sup>57</sup> cf Ibid., p.325.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p.149.



The Communist Party of India (CPI) was founded by Bengalis, firstly in 1921 and then after the arrest of most of its members it was founded again in 1925. Whilst it was an all Indian organisation, Bengalis always played a prominent role. They were largely at the forefront of its split in 1964. Although the split divided communists fairly evenly over India as a whole it was clear that the new party, CPI(M), emerged the stronger in West Bengal where it was dominated by the bhadralok. After that the chief concern of the CPI(M) in West Bengal seemed to be with modern political power, which it perceived as best achieved through parliamentary politics, competing with the Hindi dominated Congress to achieve electoral power. The CPI(M) had no mass support base and it soon became apparent that this was essential in order to achieve electorally. It looked first to the proletariat, who in Marxist terms are seen as the key to the class struggle. So they concentrated their work in Calcutta, somewhat isolated from the rest of Bengal, in particular the Bengali peasantry. Furthermore, the industrial workers in Calcutta tended to be immigrants from other parts of India.

The Congress party on the other hand gained access to the mass electorate through lines of patronage extending from local power holders in the rural areas, that is the large land owners, while in the cities it had support from the industrialists and bourgeois classes.

The early state Congress governments were slow to institute land reform measures, and when they were introduced they did not make any significant changes to the organisational structure. Initially the West Bengal government was elected in by a restricted electorate, that is restricted to property holders, so in spite of Central government pressure there was no great incentive to tackle state land reform at the state level, although it was an easier task in West Bengal than many other states as there was both a large volume of information and

experience gained by previous land reform efforts (new legislation and amendments) under the British, the latest being in 1940 with the Bengal Land Revenue (Floud) Commission which undertook an elaborate survey of the agricultural structure. In 1948 the West Bengal government undertook to prepare elaborate records of land rights and an analysis of village records in the Sundarbans. Thus it was decided to postpone any land reform legislation until the evidence of these records was available. It was 1953 before legislation was undertaken. This was the Estates Acquisition Act which introduced an ownership ceiling. However it was still possible to hold in excess of the ceiling through benami transfers. Whilst benami transfers were illegal the Act restricted enquiries of benami transfers to those made after the introduction of the bill. The five year delay in introducing the bill of course resulted in many benami transfers anticipating some land ceiling.

The high incidence of absentee landlordism and the numerous intermediaries made reform of the agrarian structure difficult. Moreover there were difficulties in achieving zamindari abolition. Firstly in so far as this involved constitutional and other legal issues it was necessary to ensure the legislation was properly worded. Secondly the issue of compensation was quite complicated with the state government having to determine formula to work the amount out as well as actually find the revenue to make the payment.

In 1967 the Congress was defeated at the state polls. No one party was able to govern in its own right. It was the CPI(M) that held the balance of power, thus it entered an alliance with Left Front parties and formed a United Front government. Thereafter the significance of this step was seen its electoral progress. This depended largely on the cultivation of electoral alliances but it involved building up mass electoral support too.

During its first period in government the CPI(M) organised a "land grab" movement for properties illegally held above the land ceiling. It was an extra-legally based self-help movement. Unfortunately it became more of a "land rush" than a land grab as various parties within the United Front wanted to join in. About 300,000 acres were recovered.<sup>59</sup> However, it was the middle rather than the poor peasants who supported and benefited from the movement.<sup>60</sup> Moreover tensions were aggravated amongst the peasantry as many of the bargadar, or sharecroppers, were evicted as a result of the confiscation of excess lands. The West Bengal Land Reform Amendment Act, 1970 was supposed to protect the rights of the bargadar creating a quasi title to the land. However, it was quite ineffective as the government failed to appreciate the vulnerability of the bardagar who were not in a position to enforce their rights. The landlords who were also the sharecroppers' moneylenders still held the balance of power. They could replace one sharecropper with another or substitute wage labour. The legislation illustrated a lack of understanding as to the situation of the bargadar, and the whole of the peasantry. Thus it was that the Naxalites, with their promises of social, political and economic change, received initial support in the rural areas.

On the parliamentary front considerable tension emerged within the United Front Government, caused chiefly by the CPI(M) which wished to dominate the government. Attention was diverted from the rural scene to clashes between the parties culminating with the imposition of President's Rule in March 1970. Elections were held in 1971 but no single party or alliance emerged as victor. The Congress formed a minority government with the backing of the central

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<sup>59</sup> Bhabani Sen Gupta, "Indian Communism and the Peasantry", Problems of Communism, 21(1) (1972): 14.

<sup>60</sup> Donald S Zagoria, "Kerala and West Bengal", Problems of Communism, 22(1) (1973): 22.

Congress government's troops. These troops were employed to crackdown on the CPI(M). The government did not last long and President's Rule had to be imposed again, with fresh elections being called in 1972, during which the CPI(M) charged the Congress with: acts of terrorism; removing names from the electoral list and the forging of other names. The Congress won that election and dominated the scene with support from the centre until the next polls in 1977.

During that time the electorally decimated CPI(M) turned its attention more towards the countryside, where there lay considerable political potential as demonstrated by the Naxalites. The CPI(M) tried to build up its rural support base by establishing local reform committees in the villages and organising itself into three tiers, operating at the village, block and district levels. At the village level the party worked through kisan and trade union fronts seeking to mobilise the peasants and workers gaining valuable feedback for the party. It sought to expose benami transfers and redistribute surplus land.

It was a much stronger CPI(M) that contested the 1977 elections allied with the Left Front. It did not join forces with the JP led Janata Party even though elsewhere in India the CPI(M) was doing just that, thus demonstrating both the strength of the Left Front electoral alliance in West Bengal and its electoral support. The CPI(M) won office and remained in government. The elections demonstrated that the electoral forces in West Bengal were quite clearly polarised between the Left and non-Left, led by the CPI(M), albeit dependent on a strong electoral alliance and the Congress respectively. This is significant because it indicates that the JP movement did not secure any stronghold in West

Bengal. The implication is that whilst students in Bihar and elsewhere in India served as the original vanguard to JP's "total revolution", the Bengali students continued to resist Gandhian type of influences.

In government the CPI(M) continued to cultivate its rural base by trying to protect the bargadar through legislation and through its organisational arm as village committees worked to assist the bargadar in registering their barga rights and with each registration issuing 600 rupees in agricultural credit to the respective title holder. Not only did this sum represent an incentive but it protected the bargadar against the withdrawal of credit by the landlord cum moneylender as punishment for the registration of their rights. A procurement programme was instituted - procuring rice for public distribution by way of a procurement levy on peasants. It required peasants to sell a percentage of their produce to official agents at a fixed rate. Small and middle peasants were exempted; thus they were able to keep what they wanted for their own needs and sell their surplus at the best possible prices. Moreover small and middle peasants were paid a good subsidy if they were forced to sell when market prices were low. Peasants with more than seven acres were levied according to a rising scale, which was designed to prevent them from hoarding their paddy and selling at inflated prices when stocks on the market were low.

Unfortunately the CPI(M) did not seem to be able to help the agricultural labourer and the small farmer who depended on supplementary labour. The government fixed a comparatively high minimum wage for rural labour: 14 rupees and 95 paise compared with eight rupees in neighbouring Bihar (1985) yet the CPI(M) party machinery only tried to ensure minimum payment of 12 rupees.<sup>61</sup> The small peasants' and labourers' major problems were

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<sup>61</sup> Interview with Comrade M A Rasul, Kisan Sabha leader at the CPI(M) offices,

unemployment. The government introduced food for relief, and work programmes such as roads and the renovation of water tanks. These programmes were of immediate value to participants who were often unemployed for most of the year and would otherwise be dependent on the moneylender for their income. Not everyone was able to participate and this led to resentment amongst those who failed to benefit.<sup>62</sup> Further, such programmes offered no long-term solutions and so whilst the poor peasants received some immediate material benefit from CPI(M), their overall position of insecurity did not appear to change.

The Bengal voluntary organisations, which will be introduced in the following chapters, have sought to work in this vacuum. The CPI(M) has adopted a hostile attitude towards them implying that the CPI(M) regards its position as being challenged by the voluntary organisations. The sort of organisations that the CPI(M) criticised had activities ranging from "education, training, developmental work to setting up organisations of sections of the people to intervene in the socio-economic and political spheres."<sup>63</sup> These are the same type of activities that JP advocated, although the CPI(M) did not draw any links. The CPI(M) accused these agencies of having "petty bourgeois anarchic ideology"<sup>64</sup> with pretensions of being a new revolutionary core in India.<sup>65</sup> Further it alleged that their presence is an imperialist strategy designed to penetrate the rural areas in order to counter Marxist work, citing both the organisations' use of funds from Western capitalist countries and their

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Alimuddin Street, Calcutta, 28.8.85.

<sup>62</sup> Bhabani Sen Gupta, "Indian Politics and the Communist Party of India (Marxist)", Problems of Communism 27(5) (1978); 14.

<sup>63</sup> Prakash Karat, "Action Groups/Voluntary Organisations: A Factor in Imperialist Strategy," The Marxist (New Delhi) (April-June 1984), pp.37-38.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p.49.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

denunciation of left parties as evidence for its claims.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, the CPI(M) specifically identified IMSE, which is one of the organisations that will be studied in the next chapters, as the type of foreign funded action group with which it was concerned. The ideology of the organisations, the funding they receive and the problems raised by this type of funding will be discussed in later chapters. What is important now is the significance CPI(M) attributed to such organisations, suggesting that the potential scope of voluntary organisation could influence the course of development in Indian society.<sup>67</sup>

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The inadequacies of the modern political states in Bihar and West Bengal are demonstrated clearly by the failure to achieve effective mobilisation at the grass roots level within the power structure. This seems to flag the need to explore alternatives. The focus in these political environments has been on parliamentary political parties which would not seem to have grasped the full significance of the grass roots situation. There has not been a halt to impoverishment of the rural masses, nor have social, economic and political freedoms been achieved. Instead there would seem to have been growing social, economic and political oppression although this has appeared more extreme in Bihar than West Bengal. Reforms that were carried out, such as some land distribution and related laws tended to be party based, favouring the middle peasants rather than the landless labourer. The political parties and interest groups that supported them were inadequate as vehicles for base level participation, that is lokniti. It is at this base level that the following chapters will examine JP's ideas through the work of a number of voluntary

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<sup>66</sup> Especially p.42 & p.49.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p.20.

organisations in order to determine whether they have a place in helping to fill this vacuum.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### BACKGROUND AND IDEOLOGY OF THE VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

#### I. INTRODUCTION

The main concern of this chapter is to introduce a number of organisations that either have sought to follow JP's ideas specifically, or at least appear to have shared some of his voluntarist type ideas and have tried to put them into practice. These are the Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini (CYSV), Nav Bharat Jagriti Kendra (NBJK) in association with Lok Samiti, the Institute for Motivating Self Employment (IMSE) and the Society for the Advancement of Rural Economy and Kultur (SAREEK). These organisations recognised that development must come from outside the formal political structure and they hoped to serve as catalysts to an alternative form of development.

JP believed that to the extent that "voluntary people's action through their voluntary agencies, is developed to that extent is democracy strengthened and meaningful to the people as a whole".<sup>1</sup> The strength of voluntary organisations lies in their flexibility as they are able to take into account specific local factors regarding the nature of poverty in a given socio-economic environment. Discovery of their goals is a matter of experiment but they can consider the prevailing conditions and plan from the primary community outwards. The Indian government recognised the value of voluntary agencies

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<sup>1</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Statement of Policy" (1974), written for the journal Today and Tomorrow, published in Continuum (October 1981), vol. 1:55.

being able to reach target groups and it involved them in the fulfillment of some of its programmes such as the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) in which voluntary agencies were actively involved in identifying suitable recipients for government subsidised loans. However, the dominant power structure did not accord voluntary organisations with any pivotal role, and planning remained centralised with the government.

The point is that voluntary organisations seem to have the potential to mobilise popular energies into strong social forces, and by extending participation this force may be channelled to achieve optimum results. Through mobilisation all these organisations could have the potential to increase the bargaining power of the poor who, without organisation, present a disunited collection with apparently conflicting loyalties. By encouraging mobilisation and participation the intention is that the diverse interests of a community can be solidified so as to intensify commitment and identification of the community, developing a structure through which they may be heard, that is lok niti. Thus any oppressive social structure regarded as inhibiting the development processes may be overcome. JP urged voluntary organisations to develop this strength by raising the consciousness of the poor in order to enable and encourage them to play an active role in their own development and the change of society. In other words JP effectively urged them to bring the voluntarist idiom from the margin to the fore of politics.

The Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini and Lok Samiti directly manifested JP's legacy and they represented an attempt to systematise many of his ideas into an organised form. It is quite clear from JP's practical political experiences that if an alternative political order is to be developed then it requires some form of structured organisation, that is, an organisation that will unite people and develop their consciousness and general awareness. The Chhatra Yuva

Sangharsh Vahini and Lok Samiti sought to work in the spirit of JP whom they still regarded as their leader. They aimed to keep alive his ideas while waiting for a new opportunity to realise their goals.

However, the CYSV and Lok Samiti pursued clearly different ideas. On the one hand JP envisaged the Vahini as the vanguard of the revolution raising issues of injustice, bringing them to public attention and seeking to mobilise the people to remedy the situations. On the other hand, Lok Samiti, which means people's committee, perhaps represented the key to the "total revolution" envisaged by JP. He regarded these independent village-based people's committees as the foundation of decentralisation and democracy, and saw them as agents of "total revolution". Thus Lok Samiti sought to promote a concrete model of decentralised self-government or lokniti, whereas the CYSV seemed concerned more to raise awareness in readiness to take on this responsibility of people's government. Given this situation it might be useful to concentrate the study of Lok Samiti on some village committees and the work that they were doing both within their respective villages and as a part of a broader popular movement. The work of Nav Bharat Jagriti Kendra (NBJK) which decided to promote Lok Samiti both as a concept and as an organisation within its particular region, could be a useful focus for studying the theory and practice of Lok Samiti.

Both the CYSV and Lok Samiti organised on a national level but their work tended to be concentrated in Bihar. Meanwhile in neighbouring West Bengal, the birth place of the Naxalites, other organisations emerged, including SAREEK and IMSE. They were independent of JP and his movement, which historically found few roots in Bengal. However, these groups developed at the same time as the upheavals of the early to mid-1970s in Bihar. The reasons

for their emergence, and the conditions in which they arose were largely similar to those that confronted the JP movement, although the ideological basis for their search was not the same as that which JP underwent.

SAREEK aimed to strengthen village people through organisation. It focused on the youth as the leaders in any social change. At the same time SAREEK aimed at the establishment of a co-ordinated series of village committees concerned very much with the welfare of their communities and anxious to increase their consciousness with respect to both their local situation and the world at large.

IMSE was concerned also with creating awareness but more than that it wanted to channel that awareness in the direction of its own ideology with the aim of building up a mass support base and demonstrating a much stronger sense of purpose than any of the other contemporary movements. That is, IMSE wanted to strengthen its own organisation by generating grass roots support. Moreover, IMSE is interesting because it made a deliberate move to spread its activities to Bihar, where it found it faced a different situation.

Neither IMSE nor SAREEK ever presented themselves on such a scale as the JP movement, but they developed in the context of the Naxalite upheavals in West Bengal, around the same time that JP began to work with the concepts of youth struggle and people's government. Moreover, both organisations were encouraged and their work was closely monitored by the Jayaprakash Institute of Social Change, formerly the Institute of Social Change and Social Welfare, which as we have seen was established by JP in order to promote an examination of the problems of social change from the perspectives provided by Gandhi and his sympathisers. Therefore, IMSE and SAREEK provided a useful comparison to the study of CYSV, NBJK and Lok Samiti.

## II. CYSV

Some reference has been made to the history of the CYSV, its background and philosophy. It was formed in 1974 at the initiative of JP who believed that young people's potential was being wasted as they appeared to be faced with only two choices. On the one hand they could succumb to Mrs Gandhi's regime, which JP argued would make them into sycophants and cowards, bowing down to an order of corruption.<sup>2</sup>

Their other option appeared to be Naxalism. The Naxalites clearly demonstrated the great potential of the youth as many able young people committed, even sacrificed, their lives to the Naxalite cause. Consequently JP was concerned that the energies of the youth be harnessed in a constructive manner, along an alternative path. Naturally such a course required organisation and direction. This was demonstrated by the failure of the Gujarati students who had begun a struggle against corruption in government in 1973 but whose movement had lacked organisation and had come to an end.<sup>3</sup>

So when the Bihari students began to agitate JP called on them to organise in the name of 'Youth for Democracy',<sup>4</sup> for youth power, he argued, could "play a decisive role in establishing the primacy of the people and securing their victory over the power of money, falsehood and brute force".<sup>5</sup> The students appeared to be aware of the fundamental problems from which society suffered

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<sup>2</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Total Revolution: Its Future", 27.6.1976, interview with Brahmanand, reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol.4, Total Revolution, ed Brahmanand (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1978), p.188.

<sup>3</sup> cf Ghanshyam Shah, Protest Movements in Two Indian States (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1977).

<sup>4</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Youth for Democracy", Everyman's, 22.12.1973, reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol. 4, 43 - 45.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 45.

and strongly desired the bringing about of basic social changes. Thus when they called on him for direction, he accepted their challenge and sought to provide the alternative path they wanted. However, during the course of the Bihar movement it became apparent to JP that there was no suitable organisation in existence. Thus he sought to establish one that would cater to the vast majority of non-partisan students and youth, providing them with the organisation and direction that they required.

The organisation that he established was open to those between the ages of 14 - 30 years. Members were required to commit themselves: to achieve the aim of "total revolution"; to rise above caste, creed and party; and not to accept membership of any political party. Their call was for a class struggle of the poor, bringing pressure to change on the upper class through non-violent means.

JP had come to the belief that one could not simply rely on changing the heart of the rich. Rather if change was to be ensured, the rich had to be forced to change and it was the pressure of popular organisation which could force them. By generating political pressure, the people would serve as tools of the revolution. It was the Vahini's job to mobilise them towards this goal. The movement grew very rapidly in the period immediately prior to the Emergency. However it was forced into a period of inactivity during the Emergency.

The Vahini was relaunched on 1 May 1977 as a national organisation but the response was not as enthusiastic as that previously experienced. It was a time when democracy apparently had been restored and there did not seem to be any issue around which the youths could rally as there had in the period that led up to the Emergency. The youths needed direction and they had to decide upon a long-term strategy for their "total revolution". Like Vinoba they recognised

land as the central issue, believing that it had "the potential to shake the social system to its roots".<sup>6</sup> However, the Vahini's approach was not of gentle persuasion such as Vinoba pursued. Rather it was based on class struggle. The Vahini members maintained that those who worked the land, that is, the productive labour, should have rights over it. Thus they took up the cause of land redistribution and decided to approach the question by taking up situations that manifested gross injustice. The directness of their approach would seem to have been in keeping with JP's later ideas, particularly his ideas about the vanguard role of the youth.

The Vahini began by concentrating its work in Bodh Gaya and aimed to force the redistribution of the Shankara Matt's surplus lands. The Matt was believed to be in possession of over 10,000 acres and this situation represented an ideal setting for their experiment. Indeed, the Matt's apparent possession of all this property presented a model of gross injustice that was symbolic of the feudal land relations through Bihar. The scale of the Matt's domination enabled the CYSV to concentrate their efforts on this one issue. They were able to mobilise many labourers for the one cause. Their task would have been much more difficult had the CYSV directed their attentions to a number of smaller landlords whose circumstances combined to present a situation of injustice on the scale of the Matt. Clearly to organise against a number of land-owners would make mobilising the people a much harder task. Perhaps issues would have been confused as different labourers working for different land-owners might have experienced different conditions; consequently they might not have been able to make the necessary linkages between their own and their peers' positions. So the Vahini focus on the Matt appeared both morally and logistically sound.

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<sup>6</sup> Manimala, "Zameen Kenkar? Jote Onkar", Manushi, (1983) vol. 3:2.

During the late 1970s the Vahini claimed a very high membership<sup>7</sup> but by the late 1980s it was suggested that the number of active workers in Bihar was only between 50 and 100.<sup>8</sup> However, the membership had been turning over continuously because of the age limit. Bihar remained the stronghold accounting for perhaps a quarter of the members.<sup>9</sup>

In fact there was no Vahini in West Bengal, although it formerly existed. It broke with the national body in 1979, and in 1980 it registered itself as a separate organisation, Sarbik Gram Bikash Kendra (Total Village Development Centre). The main reason for the split was an ideological difference as the youth in West Bengal did not agree with the approach that was being adopted by the Vahini. They thought that it necessarily provoked confrontation and this was not appropriate for a group committed to non-violence. It seemed to them that the Vahini had become preoccupied with directly challenging the existing order, wherever there was injustice, and that its priority was negative rather than positive, targeting against injustice and exploitation rather than striving for the uplift of the downtrodden. Consequently they saw this approach as almost one of hatred. The West Bengal branch's point was that non-violence was not just a matter of peaceful outward action but also of inward thought. However, the main body of the Vahini disagreed with the West Bengal branch. It regarded non-violence in terms of physical or outward action for it did not profess to be non-violent as a matter of spirituality but rather as a matter of strategy.

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<sup>7</sup> Twenty thousand members in 1979 according to Kumar Shubamoorthy, former national convenor of CYSV in an interview with Geoffrey Ostergaard, Patna, 7.1.1979, cited in Geoffrey Ostergaard, Non-violent Revolution in India, (New Delhi: Gandhi Peace Foundation, 1985), p.294.

<sup>8</sup> Philip Eldridge and Nil Ratan, "Voluntary Organisations and Popular Movements in Bihar", Lokayan Bulletin 6:4 (1988), p.12.

<sup>9</sup> Kumar Schubamoorthy, cited in Ostergaard, Non-violent Revolution, p.294.



On the other hand JP saw non-violence as a moral position. He understood that: "if the soul of non-violence is love, non-violent action, non-violent resistance or disobedience must be infused with love." Also he recognised that "this is not easy to practice " but he accepted it as an ideal to be practised, acknowledging that he had tried to practice it and had not found it easy to do so.<sup>10</sup> His desire was to change man as well as society for he wanted to create an order based on self restraint and self control, and so bring out the essential goodness of man. In this JP supported Gandhi's teaching that the means are the ends. Thus although JP encouraged the negative confrontationist strategies that the Vahini adopted, he had seen that as only one part of his non-violent "total revolution". It was not something that could be isolated.

Nevertheless, even the interpretation of physical non-violence was questioned within the main body of the CYSV. The Vahini's conviction about the strategy of non-violence was based on the rationalised argument that violence concentrates power by its very nature. The members believed that violence would not bring about any fundamental change in the structure of society or in the moral values of the people, for whatever the situation the social order was maintained by forces of power. At the same time they believed that accepting non-violence meant accepting mutual responsibility for the ordering of society. It was up to each individual to take responsibility and by this sharing, power would be decentralised. By contrast, the former Vahini members in West Bengal tended to be committed more as a question of spirituality. They regarded love and truth as the essential components of non-violence and did not see the confrontationist methods used by the Vahini as having any role. This

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<sup>10</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Total Revolution: Its Future." Exclusive interview with Brahmanand, 27.6.1976. Reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution vol.4: Total Revolution, ed. Brahmanand (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1978), p.187.

concern with the truth at any one time is central to Gandhian philosophy. It is something for which JP seemed to strive despite his confrontation with the Governments of Bihar and India, for in joining the sarvodaya movement JP had not merely looked upon non-violence as a strategy.

The West Bengal branch did not represent a large force but they were strong enough to break away from the CYSV and form the Sarbik Gram Bikash Kendra. The SGBK was still concerned with organising people to mobilise against injustice, taking up local and national struggles such as dowry, the Prime Minister's handloom and education policies. But it also directed its attention to popular mobilisation, undertaking relief work in times of disaster and engaging in constructive work with the establishment of kindergartens, support to cultural teams and forming cooperatives.

The main body of CYSV maintained its policy of physical non-violence although even that was called into question, climaxing in 1985 when some members suggested retaliatory violence was acceptable. This line led to a major debate within the Vahini, with a confrontation taking place in August of that year. The moderates who were the majority in Bihar decided that retaliatory violence was not acceptable for as soon as any form of physical violence was allowed it was very difficult to draw any line of demarcation. Their argument continued: violence means power concentrated in the hands of those who hold the means of violence, for example, whoever has the most goondas and guns. So they concluded the power rivals are likely to seek more and more power while the struggle becomes more and more removed from the people. However the radical faction controlled the national organisation. There was no evidence that either militant or moderate Vahini members had been personally involved in any act of violence.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless the clash resulted in a split with the

moderates being expelled. In spite of this the moderates continued their struggle for "total revolution", often in cooperation with the radicals. There seem to have been many cross currents and lines of division between the two factions have not been clear.<sup>12</sup>

The Vahini aimed, on the one hand, to develop a popular non-political pressure group for change; on the other it saw change in terms of a continuous or permanent revolution. As JP had explained, the point was that "everything in the world is changing ceaselessly".<sup>13</sup> JP had continued: change may be both conscious, for example, material changes or unconscious such as the human cycle of childhood to adulthood. The fact is, though, that nothing stays the same. Consequently JP cautioned that it was necessary to be aware of change for:

change might be either revolutionary or reactionary. The motive force for changes of the former kind naturally comes from the deprived and underprivileged sections of society. The task of the revolutionary leadership is to channelise the revolutionary urges of the people and to give them direction, an objective and an ideal.<sup>14</sup>

Bearing in mind his advice, the Vahini sought not to become complacent about the goals that were achieved because the situations constantly change and therefore they had to be alert, working for popular pressure that was attuned to the needs of changing circumstances. These were their basic aims. In order to strive towards these basic aims the Vahini set itself some immediate goals, including: redistribution of land, an issue which is central to the agrarian class struggle; bringing women into society because any struggle for justice must

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<sup>11</sup> cf Eldridge and Ratan, "Voluntary Organisations in Bihar," , p.15.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Total Revolution: Its Future", p.187.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p.188.

involve the whole and not just the male half of the population; the removal of untouchability, the continuance of which serves to legitimise an unequal society; a relevant or appropriate education that was universal reaching everyone and also functional, preparing people for their role in society; and decentralised forces of production that enabled participation with the focus being on man not capital-intensive centralised industry in which the only part, if any, that man plays is wage labour, quite alienated from the industry for which he works.

### III. NBJK AND LOK SAMITI

JP regarded the CYSV as the vanguard of the revolution. He did not see it as representing the actual revolution nor did the Vahini hold itself out as such. Rather it was to provide leadership. Meanwhile, JP envisaged the real revolution occurring in the villages with the establishment of decentralised self-government through people's government or people's committees, a concept that was embodied in the Lok Samiti movement which he launched in 1978. One organisation that took up this idea and actively promoted it, and sought to give concrete expression to its stated aims at the grass roots level was Nay Bharat Jagriti Kendra.

Based in Hazaribagh district, Bihar, NBJK was established in 1971 with the object of aiming to achieve equality for all people based on a belief in fundamental rights. It believed that this could best be achieved in a Gandhian type of decentralised society. Initially NBJK aimed to promote this by adapting and implementing improved agricultural techniques to the local environment so as to boost the local economy and work towards releasing people from their multi-faceted dependence on land-owners cum moneylenders. These were low

technology type of projects and included levelling the land, irrigation and the promotion of plant varieties best suited to the region.

Ostensibly NBJK was established along Gandhian ashram lines, and no meat or eggs were consumed there. However, Bahera Ashram really took the form of an institution based around its experimental farms and it developed contact with neighbouring villages. Workers such as a cook and farm labourers were employed to do much of the labouring work under the direction of the NBJK members, who supervised the farm projects and spent time seeking to convince villagers of the value of their work as well as seeking to remain abreast of current ideas in other rural development projects throughout India. NBJK did not present an absolute model for the future, arguing that many post-independent Gandhian organisations had tried to develop models but had not succeeded.<sup>15</sup> In this it received the support of JP, who had just embarked on his intensive work in Musahari.<sup>16</sup>

As JP rethought his ideas, NBJK also underwent a rethink. Consequently its members came to put less and less emphasis on constructive work, which they had found hindered their overtures into the local communities as people came to regard NBJK as strictly a welfare service organisation. The villagers were not interested in NBJK's ideas beyond the services being offered at any one time, such as the construction of a well. They were not interested in organisational work, that did not appear to be necessary to their condition. Consequently, NBJK downplayed its constructive work in favour of organisational work, and it came to regard the lok samiti concept as an integral part of its work.

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<sup>15</sup> Satish Girja, Hon Secretary of NBJK, in an interview with myself at Bahera Ashram, 3.10.1985.

<sup>16</sup> Supra, Chapter Two.

NBJK was attracted to Lok Samiti, partly perhaps because they both had links with JP but also because it thought it represented an important means to achieve popular participation and was quite distinct from the party structure. Lok Samiti was a national organisation that promoted village level committees, and as such it represented an important link between localised groups, strengthening them into a popular force. The national body kept the local committees aware of individual's rights and of the existence of relevant government schemes. Further it formulated policy with respect to various national problems. Meanwhile at the local level the lok samitis were responsible for the direction of their respective village development, for the implementation of national policy, for sharing their ideas, and for taking problems that they may have had to a higher level within the national organisation.

Lok Samiti aimed to remain aloof from party politics and its guidelines suggested that party office holders ought not be members of Lok Samiti. Ordinary party members could be members of Lok Samiti but they could not be convenors or office holders, nor could they represent the people's committees at higher levels. These guidelines were specifically laid down to prevent any party political attempts to control Lok Samiti.<sup>17</sup> This did not mean that Lok Samiti was supposed to be apolitical. JP envisaged the lok samitis being involved in the choosing and supporting of their own people's candidates and representatives, and then acting as watchdogs over whoever was elected. This watchdog role involved asking questions, checking on whether work had been done, meeting with local members regularly as well as assisting the representative in whatever way they could.<sup>18</sup> NBJK recognised Lok Samiti as an organisation through which local bodies could become an integral part of the democratic structure that JP originally envisaged.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Narayan Desai (ed) Guidelines for People's Committee, (Varanasi: Sarva Seva Sangh, 1978), p.3.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, pp.35 - 36.

NBJK became involved with Lok Samiti but this move also seemed to precipitate a split in NBJK leading to the development, in 1981 - 1982 of a rival organisation, Jan Jagaran Kendra. The immediate reason for the split involved the Lok Samiti's (and NBJK's) alleged support for Jaswant Singh, a Janata Party candidate, in the 1980 General Election. This was viewed with concern by some active members of NBJK's lok samitis, who thought that given NBJK's association with Lok Samiti, it should remain aloof from politics. It will be recalled that JP's views on the matter seemed somewhat ambivalent.<sup>20</sup> On the one hand he acted as the catalyst to the very formation of the Janata or people's party and he actively spearheaded its election campaign in 1977. On the other hand he was against the involvement of parties within the Lok Samiti, and yet he supported the notion of people's candidates who would compete with party candidates at election time. Jaswant Singh was not a people's candidate in the sense JP intended. He was a party candidate who apparently received support from NBJK. The resultant disagreement and dissatisfaction resulted in a split, out of which Jan Jagaran Kendra was formed.

However this participation in the election would seem to have been only the immediate cause of the split. Underneath there seemed to be a rejection, by the Jan Jagaran, of JP's whole concept of Lok Samiti as it leaned more towards a Marxist philosophy. In particular it believed it could not reject violent means and it favoured active rather than passive resistance. Jan Jagaran formed its own popular organisation, Mazdoor Kisan Morcha, in place of Lok Samiti. The two groups rivalled each other for support although they seemed to come to an understanding that neither would operate in the other's local areas.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "A Manifesto for Bihar", The Sunday Standard, 11.5.1975, reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol. 4: 170.

<sup>20</sup> Supra, Chapter Two.

<sup>21</sup> Reported at the monthly meeting of NBJK's lok samiti workers, Bahera Ashram,

#### IV. IMSE

The Institute for Motivating Self Employment, IMSE, sought to become an organisation through which it could mobilise people towards a more just society. IMSE's founding members including Biplab Halim, the Director, had been active in the Naxalite movement during the late 1960s so their philosophical background was Maoist. They were imprisoned and tortured as a result of their part in the Naxalite movement.<sup>22</sup> During their imprisonment they were able to rethink their ideas and goals.

Most commentators agree that the Naxalite movement failed primarily because of its inability to mobilise the masses. The IMSE founders realised that "the political struggle between CPI(ML) and CPI(M) degenerated into a tragic feud - a war of annihilation between the cadres and supporters of the two parties - a war that bewildered people and served only the interest of the ruling classes".<sup>23</sup> So they were concerned to reassure the people and build bridges towards the establishment of a socialist state. The former Naxalites rationalised that it had been their approach and not their ideals that were wrong. Nevertheless, they maintained that the concept of a mass line was still valid, that is, a mass line developed by cultivating base areas in the countryside with a view to smashing the existing state structure, believing that social change could only come about as a result of the people's own liberating force.

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30.9.1985.

<sup>22</sup> Supra, Chapter One.

<sup>23</sup> Prabhat Jan, "An Appraisal", Samar Sen, Debabrata Panda, Ashish Lahire (joint editors), Naxalbari and After, vol. 2 (Calcutta: Kathashilpa, 1978), p.124. Prabhat Jan was a writer for Frontier during the Naxalite movement. This Calcutta-based paper was sympathetic to the Naxalite movement in so far as it expressed a resurgence of political activity reacting against the lethargy or cowardice of the Marxist parties. Frontier saw hope for the young and poor through the Naxalite movement which showed promise that the system could be overturned. Nevertheless it was critical of ill-conceived Naxalite strategies.



However the means had to be reviewed and it was deemed that violent means were not appropriate. After all, violence had been the strategy employed by the Naxalites and had achieved poor results. People had been frightened by Naxalite terrorist activities and consequently had not supported them. At the same time the Naxalite violence invited government suppression, which, in the absence of any popular support for the Naxalite cause, was able to crush their activities. Therefore the former terrorists concluded that the solution lay in non-violent means, at least for the present. This required building up a strong mass base and it was decided that this could best be done by developing a strong organisation to unite the people to the revolutionary movement and by promoting economic conditions for self-reliance. Without a strong organisation the peasant masses would remain weak and disunited. However, IMSE recognised Mao's point that unless the masses "are conscious and willing, any kind of work that requires their participation will turn out to be a mere formality and will fail".<sup>24</sup>

The chief objective of the ex-Naxalite cadres was the promotion of self-reliance. They saw self-reliance, as Mao had done, in political, economic and social terms.<sup>25</sup> On the political level they hoped to develop an independent thinking by local people as to their current plight and ideas on how to overcome their situation and just what they hoped to achieve. Having stimulated people's consciousness IMSE hoped they would go further and organise themselves towards the realisation of these goals. Many of the people with whom they worked had not enjoyed this independence of thought. Decisions determining their future tended to be made by the local land-owners or moneylenders to whom they were indebted. They had no effective organisation amongst

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<sup>24</sup> Mao Tse-Tung, "The United Front in Cultural Work", 30.10.1944, Mao Tse-Tung, Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung, vol. 3, (Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1967), p.119.

<sup>25</sup> Supra, Chapter One.

themselves. By freeing their minds from dependence on the local moneylender, IMSE hoped people would free themselves economically by pooling their resources, generating self-employment and developing and investing in their own credit unions and cooperatives. By these means a measure of independence from moneylenders was built up as well as generating a sense of self-confidence that exploitative social forces could be defeated. Moreover, in becoming self-reliant, people would themselves begin to take steps towards liberation for social change and a new consciousness could be engendered.

IMSE was influenced by the work of Paulo Freire who was involved in adult education programmes in South America for a number of years before taking up the post of education consultant to the office of education of the World Council of Churches in Geneva.<sup>26</sup> Freire viewed the pedagogy of the oppressed as humanitarian and libertarian for he saw the poor as dehumanised by the oppression they suffered and dependent upon their oppressors, economically and emotionally. He began by recognising and understanding the characteristics of the poor, in particular their total lack of confidence in themselves. Therefore, first there was a need to deal with the consciousness of the oppressed. In doing this it was necessary to recognise their dependence and seek to transform it into independence. He believed that this was to be achieved by determining a process of reflection and action with the oppressed. In this way the oppressed could reflect on the causes of their oppression, confront the reality critically and act upon that reality struggling for liberation.

Freire saw reflection as essential to action, maintaining that the more people unveiled the reality, the more critically they would enter that reality and seek to activate change. Their perception of oppression would change as they realised: that struggle goes beyond simply having more to eat; and that they must be

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with Biplab Halim at Bolpur Guest House 28.1.85.

cf Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972).

responsible for any struggle to develop a new structure. This he thought could be achieved only through dialogue and a process of reflection and action. Freire's pedagogy involved not simply participation but committed involvement, and he spoke of co-intentional education, that is both teachers and students intent on reality, somewhat like JP's idea of a continuous "total revolution" to achieve "both internal and external change, changing the entire social frame from within and also from the outside, individuals as well as institutions".<sup>27</sup> JP had envisaged changing both the oppressors and the oppressed. Similarly Freire maintained that the oppressors could be converted, but he warned that conversion involves a constant re-examination of oneself and it does not allow for ambiguous behaviour. He demanded that converts no longer remain as they had been but that they become comrades with the oppressed. This contrasts with Vinoba's sulabh gramdan approach which called for a theoretical commitment to change but did not require any practical change in lifestyle.

IMSE did not have a concrete model of an alternative future but by drawing on Mao's and Freire's ideas IMSE hoped to popularly mobilise the development of a society that functioned outside the modern idiom's formal state structure, presenting an alternative economy based largely on agriculture and small industries. Thus an environment would be created in which radical social and economic change could occur. It was envisaged that this would take the form of Maoist type base areas that would be as independent as possible from the cities which these Maoist-schooled former terrorists saw as being controlled by the apparent class enemy.

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<sup>27</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Why Total Revolution", Everyman's, 22.12.1979, reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol.4: 117.

On their release from prison the ex-Naxalites found that they were ostracised from society. Consequently they were not able to find jobs and so did not have any means by which to support themselves, let alone continue their struggle. Thus they decided to find their own employment. With the encouragement of a number of important figures, in particular JP and the academic staff of the Institute of Social Change and Social Welfare, and Pannalal Dasgupta, they were able to establish a self-employment agency. JP had been attracted to Marxist violence in his youth and he appreciated the feelings of the young Naxalites and admired their commitment and self-sacrifice, even though he now disagreed with their methods. So when these Bengali youths appeared to forego terrorism JP sought to direct their efforts in a constructive fashion. The Institute of Social Change and Social Welfare had strong links with JP and shared his concern. Much of its initial work centred on the problems of the Naxalite movement as well as efforts to develop a new concept of development based on the principles and practices of non-violence. IMSE leader, Biplab Halim, suggested that perhaps they thought

these naxalite young people are no waste to us and society, they are essentially dreamers who like their forefathers want to build up a society where men will not be exploited by men, where social justice will rule. The methods used by these young people might have been wrong and many of them have now well realised it. So let us extend out helping hands to these young fellows who are going to serve the rural poor.<sup>28</sup>

It is likely that Pannalal Dasgupta thought along similar lines. Pannalal Dasgupta was a Bengali who was committed to a violent overthrow, firstly of the colonial government and then the Congress government. Later he modified his approach. He was a founding member of the Revolutionary Communist Party of India (RCPI), one of Calcutta's numerous small Marxist left political

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<sup>28</sup> Biplab Halim, "IMSE stands for a Radical Social Change", IMSE '81, Calcutta: IMSE, 1981), p.15.

groups. In 1948 he attempted to create a base area for communist guerilla activities in North Calcutta but he was arrested and imprisoned for 14 years. After his release in 1962 he took up rural development in a more peaceful and orthodox manner and he worked in the Birbhum district. Then in 1969 he stood for election and was elected to the State Legislative Assembly. However that time was a very unsettled period in West Bengal's parliamentary history and when the assembly was dissolved Pannalal Dasgupta chose not to re-enter the political sphere but to devote the rest of his life to the Tagore Society for Rural Change.

The Tagore Society for Rural Change was inspired by Rabindranath Tagore who had been a prominent Indian writer and thinker during the nationalist struggle. Tagore had held that swaraj was something that had to be found in the mind, winning humanity for all humanity.<sup>29</sup> Thus he was anxious to promote liberation and improvement of people's minds, believing that freedom would be achieved only by the awakening of each individual's conscience. He saw this as necessitating an economic and cultural renaissance in rural India synthesising Western practicality and Eastern spirituality and believed that agricultural methods, health programmes and the revival of village crafts and culture would play an important part. Education was fundamental to the development of the individual, believing that if an individual was denied education then that person was crippled being unable to enjoy the benefits of civilisation. Tagore undertook a number of experiments in education.<sup>30</sup> His

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<sup>29</sup> Rabindranath Tagore in a letter to Mr Montagu, Secretary of State for India in the British Cabinet, 6.4.1918. Reprinted in Krishna Kripalani, Rabindranath Tagore, a Biography (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p.264.

<sup>30</sup> In particular: Santiniketan, a boy's residential school in Bolpur where the boys undertook a large measure of responsibility in meeting the daily requirements of both their individual and community life, such as washing, cooking and cleaning, and where classes were held outside and conducted in the boys' mother tongue, Bengali, and gardening, dance and drama were important features of the curriculum; Visva Bharati was an international university that also emphasised cooperation and self-government; cf Santiniketan The Bolpur School of

experiments in education aimed at incorporating the merit of modernity and the scientific and technical aspects of education with the universality of spirit. Further he emphasised self-government and self-education within the schools. He believed that the aim of education should be to develop complete manhood such that each individual was liberated from ignorance, superstition, poverty, poverty of the mind and from narrowness. Underlying all this were three fundamental principles; that is freedom, fullness or inclusiveness, and vastness or universalisation. Tagore expanded his concept of education beyond that of any single institution to the much broader idea of Sriniketan, which encompassed all his basic ideas on education but operated within the actual villages emphasising agriculture and rural industries, but also included health and sanitation aiming to win the confidence of the villagers so that rural problems could be studied and research experiments could be conducted for their solution. Then the knowledge gained could be passed back to the villages so as to move towards a joint cooperative basis of all round regeneration of rural life.

The chief goal of the Tagore Society was to continue the Sriniketan idea. Its work included building small farmer cooperatives and consolidating small holdings. Such moves had important implications with regard to the level of consciousness of the peasants involved for it assumed a certain measure of responsibility on the part of each individual member for the ordering of his own life and that of the community. In addition to the high degree of mental self-sufficiency suggested, cooperatives contribute to economic self-reliance by Rabindranath Tagore (London: MacMillan & Co, 1917). In these education experiments Tagore stressed the use of the immediate environment including the use of the mother tongue in order to facilitate the assimilation of knowledge for oneself. Tagore regarded the medium of a foreign language as inhibiting the understanding of the indigenous civilisation for he explained that alien languages had hardly any connection with the reality of daily life. He used songs, drama and dance to encourage students' expression.

facilitating the acquisition of bank loans, seeds, fertilisers and the establishment of electricity, irrigation facilities and cold storage plants. Pannalal Dasgupta travelled through Bengali villages seeking to convince poor peasants that cooperatives could help them to move above their poverty.

Pannalal's actions supported M N Roy's shift away from Marxist dogmatism towards the idea of educating the masses towards their own independent thought and actions. Roy's orthodox Marxist experience though had been with the CPSU. On the other hand, Dasgupta was influenced by Mao and the experience of the CCP, which also rejected Soviet dogmatism. Mao had adapted Marxism to the Chinese situation and he had placed a great deal of emphasis on the role of the peasant, which was particularly significant in the largely rural Indian situation. The Naxalites also were influenced by Mao. Thus there was quite a strong affinity between them and Pannalal. No doubt this contributed to Pannalal's encouragement of the former Naxalites as well as making it easier for the ex-Naxalites to accept his support and with it that of JP and the Institute. Thus it was that the demoralised, ostracised ex-Naxalites were encouraged to begin their new work. Moreover, this type of support served to discourage any potential moves by the state or other forces to dismantle the emerging movement which soon grew beyond its initial self-employment agency to become an increasingly mass-based village level organisation.

All IMSE members were expected to be active members working towards strengthening the movement in much the way that Mao advocated that all communists had a duty to play an active part in building up the communist party.<sup>31</sup> There was no ceiling on who could join IMSE but it was expected

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<sup>31</sup> Supra, Chapter One.

that middle class members effectively declassed themselves and did not compromise their membership of IMSE by exploiting workers etc. This is very similar to JP's idea that the middle and rich peasants limit their profit margins and consumption patterns.<sup>32</sup>

As an organisation IMSE affiliated with AVARD and it was instrumental in establishing a Rural Press Agency.<sup>33</sup> Thus it developed a strong organisational structure that supported and strengthened its continuance, with committees at the village, block and district level, implementing IMSE policy and contributing to IMSE policy.

So IMSE's ideas were not rooted in those of JP although they had been associated with him and JP initiated organisations, in particular the Institute of Social Change and Social Welfare, and AVARD. IMSE's ideas more likely represented an extension of its Naxalite philosophy which was based on Mao's teachings. Nevertheless many of its concepts were not inconsistent with those held by JP such as its emphasis on developing local resources while at the same time cooperating and sharing ideas and experiences, enabling it to deepen its knowledge and understanding of other like-minded organisations and of rural India generally.

## V. SAREEK

Like IMSE, SAREEK, which stands for the Society for Rural Economy, Education and Kultur and means "partners" in Bengali, also began by wanting to present an alternative to Naxalism. The idea behind SAREEK's formation was a cumulative process. During the late 1960s and early 1970s quite a

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<sup>32</sup> Supra, Chapter Two.

<sup>33</sup> That is, a committee that has been formed to network rural newspapers in order to facilitate the dissemination of news and ideas.



number of Calcutta-based youths, many of whom were Christian, became concerned with the problems of poverty and rural development on the one hand, and with the rise of the Naxalites and such groups as the Jharkand tribal separatist movement on the other. They became involved in organising work camps, undertaking such activities as building roads or putting on cultural programmes that emphasised popular action. However, their work was fairly sporadic. Meanwhile the government and the large international institutions sponsored large-scale development projects such as building canals or, more dramatically, the Green Revolution. It became apparent to these youths that such programmes were not providing the necessary solution. They also realised that if they were to achieve anything constructive themselves then they would have to systematise and consolidate their work. This led to considerable rethinking and determination to find new strategies.

It roused the interest of other established groups, in particular the William Carey Study and Research Centre, Calcutta, which gave a small fund for organising a series of seminars to discuss the issues. It was from these workshops that the concept of SAREEK emerged and was eventually established in 1978 with some financial support from Bread for the World. SAREEK had strong links with Christian organisations such as the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion (CISRS) and the National Christian Council of India although it was not a Christian organisation. Its first director, Sanjeev Sarkar, had been the regional secretary for CISRS. Those involved with SAREEK did not hold to any particular philosophical tradition such as Maoism or Gandhism but they seemed to be continuing the liberalism advocated by such Bengali thinkers as Rabindranath Tagore and Ram Mohan Roy.<sup>34</sup> They regarded movements such as Gandhi's nationalist movement and Martin Luther

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<sup>34</sup> Supra, Chapter One and this chapter.

King's civil rights movement as paradigmatic and were concerned to find an alternative society based on non-violent struggle.<sup>35</sup>

SAREEK and the JP-based Institute of Social Change and Social Welfare which was also anxious to promote new theories and practices, shared a mutual interest in each other's work. One of the Institute's programmes was to undertake an evaluation of voluntary organisations and in doing this it paid special attention to SAREEK.<sup>36</sup> Also SAREEK workers undertook a job training course with the Institute in June 1983 on methods of working with poor people. Thus SAREEK enjoyed an indirect contact with JP's philosophy.

When it was established, SAREEK basically consisted of a Calcutta headquarters group which established contact with youth groups in rural areas encouraging them to undertake various development projects in their areas. SAREEK was to provide the groups with moral and some financial support as well as encouraging the formation of a coordinating committee within each area that it worked. Each youth group was to be represented on the respective committees and the committees' main task was to take up initiatives for development purposes within their areas. It was in this manner that SAREEK undertook its practical work.

On the ideological side, SAREEK's analysis of the problems of injustice tended to be in Marxist terms, speaking of class enemies etc. However, its solution did not seem to be as clear cut. It was concerned to develop the powers of analysis by local people with respect to investment, employment, occupation, land-holding patterns and so forth so that it could be realised just who were the

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<sup>35</sup> Sanjeev Sarkar, Sugata Das Gupta, R K Bhattacharya, Interim Report on Activities and Programmes of SAREEK, September 1981, draft, c/- Jayaprakash Institute of Social Change, p. IV/3.

<sup>36</sup> See Sarkar et al, Interim Report and Jayaprakash Institute of Social Change Report for the Year 1980-1981 (Prof Sugata Dasgupta: Calcutta, 1981), p.4.

allies and who were the exploiters. The ultimate goal was to realise power for the powerless but the means were not very clear. It saw itself as adapting Maoist type guerilla strategies, though it did not accept violence as a practical means. From the Naxalite experience it was seen that violence alienated the masses and encouraged government suppression. Nevertheless, the Maoist idea of not confronting the total problem headlong but rather concentrating on developing base areas was regarded as viable. SAREEK sought to build up such base areas through locality based programmes, the use of indigenous cultural tools, training and educational work.

In conscientising people, SAREEK's main thrust was to develop a basic science and technology awareness among the people in order to help them overcome various myths and prejudices influenced by fatalism, which inhibited their development and left them particularly vulnerable to exploitation. SAREEK maintained that through organisation the onus of social change could be transferred to the poor and the depressed communities. Moreover it was a means of crossing lines of religion, caste, clan and provincialism, enabling people to participate actively in every field of society. Further SAREEK believed that through this organisational work and resultant constructive activity a clearer vision for the future would emerge.

Organisation in West Bengal is generally seen along party lines but SAREEK was concerned to promote a concept of class instead of party. Thus it opened the way for a new mode of politics, a mass politics, generating awareness amongst all people irrespective of creed, status or politics, that is, an awareness of each individual's responsibilities to and roles and rights within the wider community.

SAREEK never had any direct link with JP but the thinking behind it developed as a reaction to very similar conditions that JP faced when he realised that a new approach was necessary to reach the masses and counter the Naxalite movement. From the Naxalite movement JP was able to recognise the potential of the youth and he became determined to harness them towards constructive change, a change that could best be achieved through their own actions and decisions. This required a people's forum allowing for such discussion and decision-making. It would seem that a number of parallels can be drawn between the ideas of SAREEK and JP, for SAREEK too chose to concentrate on the youth as the main motivators for change and at the same time sought to establish some village organisation through which this change could be actualised, enabling the participation of all. It sought to woo the youth, interest them in understanding the plight of their communities and engender within them a caring attitude towards their communities so that they might direct their energies towards overcoming the prevailing injustices. This involved convincing, organising and involving the whole community, developing a participatory structure capable of responding to needs within the community, determining and resolving the grievances that affected the local and even wider communities. Thus SAREEK tried to combine the ideas of a yuva vahini and lok samiti.

## VI CONCLUSION

The type of ideas that JP expressed within a voluntarist idiom would seem to have been relevant to the work of the four above mentioned organisations in their work to organise people, develop their consciousness and experiment towards a means for mobilising for popular revolutionary change. The CYSV and NBJK were directly linked with JP and they maintained that they were pursuing the path he had directed. On the other hand the driving force behind

IMSE was its founders' Marxist (and Maoist) experiences, from which it extracted a non-violent way. It was encouraged to pursue this road by JP and the Jayaprakash Institute of Social Change. Meanwhile the SAREEK founders had not been involved with Marxist forces but they were influenced by the Naxalites' sense of urgency. SAREEK understood the Naxalites' frustration with the prevailing injustices but it did not agree with their means. Thus SAREEK was anxious to explore alternative means of overcoming these problems. SAREEK also received support for its work from the Jayaprakash Institute, which maintained a close interest in the structure, activities and overall progress of both organisations. The study of the four organisations is continued in the next chapter which examines their structures and respective scope for democratic participation.

## CHAPTER SIX

### ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE AND DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

#### I. INTRODUCTION

This chapter re-examines JP's ideas on organisational structure and democratic participation, then continues the examination of Lok Samiti with NBJK, CYSV, IMSE and SAREEK looking at their respective organisational structures.

JP believed that power came through organisation both at the local and national levels and through cooperation with like-minded organisations in order to share knowledge. In so far as he sought to ensure effective working of the existing structure, he recognised the need for organisational structure, the basis of which was the lok samiti, gram sabha or janata sarkar. He sought to give concrete shape to this concept through the Lok Samiti, a national organisation which promoted village committees through which information could be disseminated, and which could be used to encourage, support and develop models of self-management. JP was concerned that everyone should participate in the democratic process and that the organisational structure should provide opportunity for this, breaking down societal barriers of caste, poverty, social status, illiteracy and gender.

JP also envisaged some form of organisational structure for training motivators working along with Lok Samiti. He believed a revolutionary vanguard was important to lead the people, that is, committed supporters who could be

flexible in their movement. The vanguard needed constructive direction for its energy and the frustrations it felt in the current situation. Thus JP hoped to harness its strength towards leading people to a "total revolution". JP thought that students would be ideal for this leadership role for he saw them as discontent with the existing system and anxious for change. Furthermore, generally they were not tied down with family and business responsibilities so had time to devote to the movement.

Organisational work requires finance both for maintenance of the infrastructure and for the activities undertaken by the organisations, although JP saw the youth cadres as being dependent on the people with whom they worked for their food and shelter. JP believed that as they had no family responsibilities their needs would not be great during the few years that they devoted to the movement. This approach was also likely to promote the development of a spirit of cooperation between the cadres and people, and amongst people themselves. Furthermore, JP hoped that everyone could be independent and mobilise their own resources especially through the use of man power and by making use of local materials. Villagers could contribute towards a gram kosh, establish grain banks and other cooperatives. They could also be made aware and take advantage of available government programmes, although he also hoped to reduce bureaucracy, leaving a corresponding portion of revenue to be decentralised. JP's emphasis was on local responsibility.

## II. LOK SAMITI AND NBJK

### 1. Structure

The concept of Janata Sarkar or Lok Samiti was promoted by JP. On the one hand this organisation was intended to represent a national body capable of

disseminating information for the use of all local groups and of providing moral support and guidance for the same groups. On the other hand it was an attempt to provide an infrastructure through which the formation of village level committees was feasible, but it did not provide the actual structure of these groups. That was to be determined at local level. Basically the idea was that self-government would be advanced through understanding brought about by a full discussion of the issues involved at regular village meetings.

Generally speaking, according to the Lok Samiti guidelines, anyone above the age of 18 years could be a member of a lok samiti including members of political parties. However, there were three conditions: office holders of political parties could not be members; anyone who was a member of a political party could not be a convenor or office holder of a lok samiti; and anyone who was a member of a political party could not be a representative of a lok samiti at higher levels. Thus it was hoped to prevent party politics from controlling the lok samitis and this view reflected JP's idea of lokniti.

The organisation, Lok Samiti, worked from two levels, from top to bottom and bottom to top, operating at the village, panchayat (or in the cities at the neighbourhood and mohilla or ward), block, constituency, state and national levels. It did not lay down any organisational rules but rather presented a series of guidelines.<sup>1</sup> At the top end the functions were: to draw attention towards national problems; to study some specific problems; to help organise lok samitis at lower levels; to educate the people about the concept of lok samitis, and to bring out publications to publicise people's committees and training. One of the general organisational tasks of the national and state people's committees included preparing lists of those who were interested or wished to

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<sup>1</sup> Narayan Desai (ed) Guidelines for People's Committees (Varanasi: Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan), 1978).



help organise lok samitis and to harness their energies. Nav Bharat Jagriti Kendra took on this responsibility in the district of Hazaribagh, Bihar, and neighbouring areas.

In order to organise village and panchayat level lok samitis the Lok Samiti guidelines suggested - choosing first to work in those villages where favourable conditions prevailed, and then working so as to create an appropriate atmosphere in which to call a general village meeting. It was advised that special efforts should be made to involve weaker sections of the community such as women, Harijans and Adivasis. Bearing this in mind the guidelines further advised that special attention should be paid to the place and time when the meeting was to be held. Then, it warned, in publicising the concept of lok samiti, false expectations should not be raised and a realistic understanding needs to be conveyed. At the general meeting the villagers should be asked whether they would like to form a lok samiti now or later. If later, a time and a place should be fixed.

The basic unit of Lok Samiti was the village people's committee. There could be a number of separate committees within one village depending on its size. The size of the committee was dependent on the size of the village, usually from five to 15, with proper representations being given to Harijans, Adivasis, Muslims, women and youth. These members were to be selected at the public meeting by public consensus and a conscious effort was to be made to choose only people of integrity. The guidelines continued: each committee should have a convenor who was responsible for calling meetings and recording decisions; members should meet at least once a month; information about committee proceedings like income and expenditure should be given and plans made for the next programme, and meetings should not be organised like units of a political party.

The representatives and convenors of the village committees were to form the panchayat lok samiti with its members numbering from 11 - 15. This committee was to have one convenor. Then the representatives and convenors of the panchayat formed the block lok samiti. So if there were 20 panchayats in one block and each panchayat had formed its committee and each committee had five representatives, the number of block lok samitis would be ten. It could number up to 600. The representatives of the Panchayat PC were also to be members of the constituency level PC.

NBJK which undertook this type of organisation, was registered under the Charitable Society Act 1860 in 1971. It began with a self-appointed governing body of seven members and grew to eight, including six of the original members and two new members. The quorum for decision making by the governing body was five and the governing body had responsibility for financial questions. Every three years the positions of secretary, treasurer and president were changed by the governing body. NBJK established itself at an ashram at Bahera, near Chouparan. There it ran its office and an experimental farm. The ashram consisted of a fairly modest collection of buildings where the NBJK members and some of their families lived and worked. It also had a homeopathic clinic and a classroom where it conducted a school for local children. In addition there was a large barn-like room where it stored its motor cycle and held monthly meetings with its workers who usually were accommodated overnight. The ashram was connected to the main power line but generally there was no power. It had its own pump, used for irrigation purposes and water was carried by buckets to the buildings for domestic requirements.

## 2. Participation

The Lok Samiti guidelines were important but they were taken as guidelines rather than as rigid rules as NBJK workers sought to adapt the concept of lok samiti to local circumstances. Perhaps the biggest divergence was in representation and participation. The workers found it very difficult to implement the Lok Samiti ideals of proper representation in situations where the whole concept of lok samiti and the popular participation it entails was new. On the one hand, the socially dominant sectors of the society were reluctant and not used to sharing decision-making with everyone else. On the other hand, the socially weaker sectors, in particular the Harijans and the women, found themselves inhibited by such organisations.

With regard to the Harijans, NBJK workers sought to overcome their inhibitions by establishing separate organisations in specifically Harijan communities where the Harijan community was more than one kilometer from the village proper. This separate, and perhaps sheltered participatory experience, did not seem to reflect the true spirit of Lok Samiti. Nevertheless, the NBJK workers' argument in favour of these separate organisations was that it was important to ensure that the Harijans experienced the kind of participation afforded by the local samitis, for these committees played an important role within the Harijan communities developing a sense of responsibility and solidarity. They hoped that eventually the Harijans would develop the confidence to participate actively in the wider community. Meanwhile they also hoped that the wider community would come to accept such participation, recognising parallels between all forms of social and economic exploitation perpetrated at different levels of society. There are difficulties with this argument, the main one being that the promotion of separate organisation effectively promotes a separate identity and thus exacerbates and perpetuates the problem.

Certainly the Indian constitutional experience would seem to confirm the idea that the problem is exacerbated and perpetuated by separate arrangements. The Indian Constitution sought to resolve the backwardness of a number of communities, in particular the Harijans and Tribals, by scheduling them within the Constitution and reserving for them so many seats within the parliament, so many civil service posts and so many places within educational institutions etc. In addition, successive governments of India - and the various states - made special grants available to certain sectors of society, ostensibly to give them a chance and enable them to overcome their backwardness and compete within the larger community. However, constitutional attempts to compensate for historical injustices resulted in creating new suspicions and resentments. The flood gates to the welfare booty opened up as other so-called 'backward' groups sought to stake a claim. These are groups who were not really so socially inferior within the caste system, but who perceived themselves as economically disadvantaged. This rush deepened social cleavages and effectively ensured that the Harijans remain just that - Harijans or Untouchables. Moreover, it encouraged a communal style of politicising as caste-based factional politics were promoted amongst political elites who emerged from the Reserved communities.<sup>2</sup>

The whole system of Reservation seemed fated to perpetuate itself as it created vested interests as well as making the communities more conscious of their separate identities. Thus it seemed to defeat its purpose.<sup>3</sup> The fact is that the Harijan problem is an emotional one caught up in a spirit of charity and piety and it really poses a dilemma for those involved in trying to overcome it.

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<sup>2</sup> Supra, Chapter Two.

<sup>3</sup> cf: Chetakar Jha, "Reserved Representation", Seminar, 243 (1979): 29-30.

With regard to women, NBJK did not establish separate women's organisations. (Nor did the Constitution reserve special positions for women.) It was open to women to become involved with NBJK's lok samitis as indeed some did, but their participation rate was very poor. They felt inhibited; indeed, it appeared that they were actively discouraged by many men who felt that their prestige would be lowered if women were to realise their full potential within the lok samitis, and society as a whole. The NBJK workers were concerned at the low level of female involvement. However, they believed that the women were making progress and that basically this was due to the operation of lok samiti, which they claimed increased general awareness within the community.

To some extent there may have been a relaxation of social barriers imposed by men but, more particularly, women became aware of things that they could do to improve their situation and that of their families. For example, they could go to the Block Development Office and apply for loans to finance small economic projects that would not only boost their morale and living standard, but also give them some financial independence, and consequently social independence from their menfolk. Furthermore, women tended to play a predominant role in protests organised by the lok samitis against such issues as local corruption, for example, health workers who refused to give treatment unless they received some extra consideration. The women perceived many such issues as affecting the welfare of their families and as such they could identify with the problems and were willing to take an active role in working to overcome them. The NBJK workers believed that this type of involvement was giving the women confidence to speak out within the lok samitis and they hoped that the men were beginning to respect the women's views.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless the participation of women was poor and it presented a problem if NBJK and the lok samitis were going to achieve JP's "total revolution".

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<sup>4</sup> Interviews with NBJK workers, Bahera Ashram, 1.10.1985.

### 3. Field Workers

NBJK's work was carried out by its field workers whose main task was to organise the villagers to form lok samitis. The workers who were recruited by NBJK were already motivated and conscious. Usually they were not local to their field work areas but they shared NBJK's belief in basic grass roots organisation and were committed to the sort of community organisation work that NBJK was undertaking.<sup>5</sup> Generally they had some experience in community organisation and enjoyed extensive links with other organisations. A number of the NBJK workers were formerly involved in and arrested during the JP movement. After they were released many were unable to find jobs until they were recruited by NBJK in the post-Emergency period. Workers were often recruited through contacts made at seminars on social organisation and related development issues. Then perhaps they were invited for two or three months training with NBJK after which they might be recruited. Most of the workers were male from a poor to middle class background. Generally they had attained a high level of formal education; some were graduates and the majority had matriculated.<sup>6</sup> Education was seen as important in enabling them to communicate adequately with government officials.

In establishing the lok samitis NBJK field workers generally began by setting up an office near the headquarters of the block in which they were working. This was basically for convenience; however, they frequently worked in the

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<sup>5</sup> This does not necessarily mean that they are all committed in the long term. For example, one worker is a former Naxalite who believes that when the time is ripe, then violence will be the correct strategy. Interview with NBJK field workers, 1.10.1985, Bahera Ashram.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with NBJK secretary, Prabhunath Sharma, Bahera Ashram, 2.10.1985.

villages, staying overnight. Apparently, evenings were the most convenient time for the villagers, for it was the time when those who worked in the fields came home. Then the NBJK workers organised meetings, surveyed and discussed problems, and worked out a strategy to deal with the situation. Their main role was to motivate and activate distressed people, encouraging them to find out their own solutions to the problems they faced, starting by establishing their own lok samitis, which provided a forum in which issues could be raised and discussed, responsibility accepted and action taken.

Of course, there were many problems and frustrations that the NBJK workers had to face. Thus NBJK sought to provide them with moral support to help them work through any particular difficulties they might face, not to mention help them work through the whole of the task that they had undertaken. NBJK kept itself and its workers abreast of workshops and conferences on relevant subjects. In addition NBJK usually organised two training camps a year to which different workers were invited to attend to share in the group discussion and ideological action.

Also, the workers all met together monthly at Bahera Ashram to discuss and evaluate the work for the past month. This served as a morale booster and an invaluable sounding board from which good advice could emanate. These monthly meetings helped both NBJK and the workers keep in touch and thus appreciate each others' positions. Indeed NBJK recognised that it was an institutional establishment and represented a hierarchy. As a consequence, misunderstandings sometimes arose, particularly with regard to the village-level workers whose problems were not always understood. Generally these workers stayed with NBJK and there was not been a high turnover which suggested that they were happy and committed to their work. Certainly they

did not remain for the financial rewards as they were paid only a subsistence allowance, although they sometimes received additional benefits such as medical care.

There were 32 full-time workers in addition to about 200 part-timers.<sup>7</sup> In Hazaribagh district NBJK worked in 500 villages over 13 blocks with two or three workers in each block.<sup>8</sup> Outside Hazaribagh it worked in about 300-400 villages over 12 blocks.<sup>9</sup> However, it only had one full-time worker or perhaps only part-time workers active in these blocks. There were no full-time female workers, although three or four had worked with NBJK in the past. The main reason for their poor participation seemed to be competing domestic commitments and resultant social pressures. Meanwhile, about 10% of the part-time workers were female.

#### 4. Funding

All this work required funding which proved to be an important and controversial issue. NBJK received foreign funding for some of its development projects. JP was not in favour of receiving outside funding for lok samitis, which he wanted to be self-reliant. Thus in so far as NBJK purported to support JP's ideas it needed to rationalise its use of foreign funding in accordance with JP's views. NBJK decided not to aid the lok samitis directly. They were required to raise their own finances which they did through membership subscriptions, establishing village funds and grain banks. Also NBJK encouraged them to tap into government sponsored programmes which provided finance for projects such as building wells or training schemes.

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with NBJK secretary, Prabhunath Sharma, Bahera Ashram, 2.10.1985.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with NBJK president, Satish Girija, Bahera Ashram, 3.10.1985.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.



Nevertheless the lok samitis received indirect foreign funding through the support they received from the NBJK workers who acted as both the initiators and motivators of these lok samitis. It is not clear whether this conflicted with JP's belief that village committees should be independent and mobilise their own resources. JP did not appear to have thought in terms of motivators who are salaried from outside the communities with which they work. He thought they should be dependent on the local community. NBJK's approach was not likely to facilitate the same level of understanding between people and workers, and there was always a danger that while the workers were externally funded the lok samitis might take their work for granted and become dependent on their continued presence. However, the workers regarded themselves and the lok samitis as independent from each other. They believed that the important point was that the community worked for itself, for the workers saw that as lasting, while they regarded their own presence as temporary.

For its part, Bahera Ashram was self-sufficient. Initially two of its members, both engineers, left Bahera in 1972 in order to earn some money to provide funding for the Institute. By 1981 they felt sufficiently confident to resign their posts and return to the ashram full-time. The self-sufficiency of the ashram covered the running costs of the ashram such as supporting the Institute's members and any workers who might have been employed there, as well as maintaining the motorcycle etc.

However, it did not cover the projects or the payment of field workers. This funding came from two main sources. Firstly, the lok samitis contributed towards the actual work of NBJK, paying one rupee every year per member and contributing one to five kilograms of paddy per family at harvest time. This was in addition to the actual lok samiti subscription. The money that went to NBJK helped cover the expenses of local camps, block level meetings, mass demonstrations, poster and pamphlet publications etc. Meanwhile funding for

the field workers and for any other programmes that might be undertaken by NBJK, such as legal aid and education classes, had come mainly from overseas sources, in particular OXFAM, Community Aid Abroad and Bread for the World. NBJK was very conscious of its dependence on foreign aid and sometimes felt it was pressured in certain directions as foreign agencies may have had different ideas. Nevertheless NBJK also feared that if the money was stopped its work will be negatively affected.

### III. CYSV

#### 1 & 2. Structure and Participation

The Vahini regarded itself as the vanguard of the JP proposed total revolution. It was an organisation of motivators and aimed to raise the consciousness and sense of responsibility of its members. It did not hold itself out as representing the "total revolution". JP had not conceived it as such. Instead that was represented by the Lok Samiti, which encouraged the Vahini to participate in its organisation at all levels. Meanwhile the Vahini organisation was restricted to serve the vanguard purpose, for example, membership was open only to those who were between the ages of 14 and 30 years, which was a time when many people were likely to have much energy and few responsibilities such as family; thus they were able to devote much time towards such work as the Vahini undertook. They had to pledge to achieve the aim of "total revolution", to rise above caste, creed and piety, and not to accept membership of any political party.

The CYSV's organisational activities extended beyond the actual Vahini in so far as the members sought to mobilise the peasants into such groups as the Mazdoor Kisan Samiti, that is, the Farmers' and Labourers' Committee, which

was active in Bodh Gaya. The Mazdoor Kisan Samiti took its lead from the CYSV but it was quite separate and many local youths who had been involved with CYSV could move into this organisation once they had turned 30 and were obliged to leave the Vahini. Nevertheless the fact was that the CYSV's organisational structure was oriented very much towards its limited membership.

There were three levels of membership - primary, active and full-time. Greater commitment was required from the active and fulltime members. The active members had to attend at least two training camps and give 45 days a year to intensive work. Full-timers were active members who devoted all their time to the cause. However all members had to subscribe to the "non-violent" philosophy in the spirit of "total revolution". As mentioned in the last chapter problems over the definition of "non-violence" actually led to a split in the organisation in August 1985. The moderate faction was stronger in Bihar. However lines of division were not always clear cut, and informal cooperation occurred between the two factions.<sup>10</sup>

The Vahini membership<sup>11</sup> had a large turnover due to the self-imposed age limit. Past members often maintained links with the CYSV but they did not participate in the organisation. They could sympathise or lend it support, or they could take up their own intensive work. The point was that the Vahini was regarded as a training ground, giving youth a sense of direction. It was organised at the national level although a quarter of its members were in Bihar.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> cf Philip Eldridge and Nil Ratan, "Voluntary Organisations And Popular Movements in Bihar," Lokayan Bulletin 6 (1988):15.

<sup>11</sup> Supra, Chapter Five.

<sup>12</sup> Geoffrey Ostergaard in an interview with Kumar Shubamoorthy, former national convenor in Patna, 26.9.1985. Geoffrey Ostergaard, Nonviolent

There were four tiers in its organisational structure. At the lowest level, basic committees were organised amongst students in their respective colleges or amongst youths at the ward level in their local areas. These committees elected a representative and a convenor, and similarly a block committee representative and a convenor represented these groups at the state level. The local committees took up local issues and also carried out state or national programmes such as demonstrating against government policies. Meanwhile the state committee was responsible for wider programmes such as Bodh Gaya.

### 3. Field Workers

The State committee directed its active and full-time members in their work. Full-timers were likely to be required to work in one particular area, where they would be dependent for material support on the people with whom they worked. The thinking was that if the workers were doing good works then local support would come. This approach was supported by JP, and it facilitated the development of a rapport between the cadres and villagers. However the state committee could also subsidise full-timers as regards additional expenses such as travelling.

The CYSV workers differed from the NBJK workers because they were not looking at any lifetime commitment to their work within the CYSV. They were required to quit the organisation by the age of 30 years. Vahini workers tended to spend only between one and five years in full-time service, and this was at a time when they were young, energetic and with no additional responsibilities such as family. Their work was on-going but the idea was that younger people

Revolution in India, (New Delhi: Gandhi Peace Foundation, 1985), p.294.

would come up and take on the responsibility. Workers were continuously being drawn from a rising pool of energy, and questions of financial support and burn-out were not considered to be problems. They received moral support in the form of training camps and the help of active members or new full-timers.

#### 4. Funding

As mentioned CYSV workers were dependent for financial support on the communities with whom they lived. Nevertheless the CYSV faced other running expenses in the management of its organisation such as travel and communication. It would not accept foreign assistance. There were a number of reasons for this. Firstly, it regarded its work as revolutionary, moving towards an Indian revolution. So it did not want to be directed, or seen to be directed, in any way by any outside agency. In this regard, it was suspicious of overseas agencies and it was concerned not to be infiltrated by what it regarded as counter-revolutionary groups such as the CIA. Another reason was that it did not want its revolutionary work to be jeopardised by a sudden withdrawal of funding which was always a possibility with overseas agencies, either owing to the volition of the donor agencies or action by the Government of India. Nevertheless the extremity of this argument was another point of contention at the time the split occurred in the CYSV.<sup>13</sup> The moderates distinguished the Vahini's revolutionary work from work that might be undertaken by other organisations with which the CYSV or some of its members might be involved. They argued that the latter ought not be precluded from accepting foreign funding.

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<sup>13</sup> cf Eldridge and Ratan, "Voluntary Organisations in Bihar," pp.14-15.

The Vahini relied on local donations but not if they came from commercial houses or represented known "black money" as this would be seen to compromise the Vahini's ideals. Commercial houses, after all, had a stake in the prevailing system, and "black money", by its very definition, was illegal. Consequently much of the CYSV's funding came from its members who worked outside the organisation, and may not have had a great deal of time to give to the CYSV but were willing to support those who did. Nevertheless, sometimes a shortage of funds meant it could not promote issues as effectively as it would have liked.

#### IV. IMSE

##### 1 & 2. Structure and Participation

The nature of IMSE was such that participation was very much an integral part of its structure as it sought to mobilise its members within its fold. It was registered under the Society's Registration Act (West Bengal) which gave it legitimacy within the existing state structure and presumably some protection from potentially unfavourable state forces as well as enabling it to apply for government grants to fund various projects. The Act required it to have a Board of Directors and IMSE enlisted the support of a number of influential persons such as Pannal Dasgupta who was Chairman. The Board maintained a fairly inactive role although its members had the potential for asserting themselves, at least in so far as IMSE represented a registered society.

However, the actual working of IMSE went far beyond the formal constitution that it represented as a registered society. IMSE was organised very much like a political party. It had its own song and flag, and it demanded loyalty from its

members. There were several tiers to the organisation. From the lowest these were: village, cluster, area, district and central committee. There was no state level although there was a growing presence in Bihar and Orissa as well as in West Bengal. Whilst the emphasis was on decentralisation and apparently only a coordinating role was designated to the higher levels, the real situation was more a case of democratic centralism. Overall, policy direction came from the IMSE hierarchy. IMSE's organisation was different from JP's inverted pyramid of power. IMSE was working towards a socialist state, not self-government, but it envisaged its socialist state occurring through a structure of responsible and conscious members who were prepared to contribute to the welfare of the state as a whole.

The lower committees, which met at least once a week, were concerned with ongoing and continuing evaluation processes of their own work and of wider political and national issues. Meanwhile the district committees, which were attended also by the Director in his coordinating role over the whole organisation, took the major decisions especially on large projects where technical assistance was required or outside funding needed. They also served as planning and evaluating bodies. IMSE aimed to be responsive to its local groups. Policies were adapted to local circumstances, and guided involvement from the grass roots was encouraged through their participation in various projects and programmes at both the local and broader levels such as grain banks and long marches. The channels of communication between the local groups and the centre were open, both for the local groups to implement the centre's decisions and for the centre to understand the grass roots' needs and grass roots' reaction to its decisions. The decision-making process thus was designed to be democratic, although it tended to be somewhat centralised - ostensibly to ensure coordination and expertise but above all to give direction.

IMSE had a number of employees, mainly technical staff, such as a driver and an accountant. They had to be sympathetic to the IMSE cause and were required to work under the guidance of the elected bodies at the base of which were the villages. At the village level were the IMSE members, about 10,000 of them, who paid a nominal subscription of 25 paise per annum.<sup>14</sup> Only IMSE members could benefit from its programmes. There was no restriction on who could join but the members were expected to involve themselves in IMSE's work. Only about 30% of the members were women and their involvement significantly decreased further up the hierarchy.<sup>15</sup> IMSE presented no structural barriers towards the participation of women and other socially disadvantaged groups but their participation rate was poor. This was a fact of which the central committee was conscious and many of its activities were designed to promote greater participation.

### 3. Field Workers

The village committee consisted of president, secretary and working committee members. The village secretaries were the representatives at the cluster level; and the cluster secretaries were recognised as full-time field workers, and thus received a subsistence allowance. However, they were not employed as such. Rather they were regarded as whole-timers. At the village level there were no paid whole-timers although the role of secretary tended to be very much one of whole-timer. The workers came from within its own ranks and were local to the communities they represented.

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with the Director, Biblap Halim and District Secretary, Rabi Dasgupta, 28.1.1985, at their office cum guesthouse at Amar Kuter near Bolpur, Birbhum district.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.



Leadership was emerging from the villages but Biblap Halim did not regard it as capable of taking up the coordinating role he fulfilled. He believed that this gap was due to a lack of experience and he realised that being older and having been involved with the Naxalite frontline he himself had that experience. Biblap's attitude was indicative of the extent to which IMSE aimed to assume the character of a mass movement. However, it also raised the question as to whether IMSE had clear goals and strategies to achieve these. Nevertheless, Biblap believed that time and continued involvement in IMSE's struggles would reduce that leadership gap.<sup>16</sup>

#### 4 . Funding

IMSE's funding sources included foreign and local donations, membership fees, whatever moneys could be raised locally, and government grants. With regard to village level projects IMSE tried to encourage the utilisation of local resources as far as possible, requiring the villagers to devise ways of making their own money through self-employment, the formation of cooperatives or by making applications to local government offices. The actual coordinating body of IMSE received donations from local and overseas sympathisers such as Bread for the World, Protestant Central Agency for Development Aid and Community Aid Abroad. These moneys were used in the general running of the organisation as well as for holding training seminars and camps; for example, those involved in the instruction of adult education. However, it was loathe to spend much of these funds at the village level for anything other than training purposes.

Government funds, from both the central and state governments were channelled towards adult education, mother and child health programmes and for various training schemes with which IMSE was involved such as the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), khadi, leatherwork and

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Biblap Halim, 28.1.1985, Santali campus.

smokeless chullas. The question of whether or not to accept government funding was a subject of debate within IMSE. Its decision to accept was significant partly because it was a voluntary organisation working outside the government sphere but more particularly because of its Naxalite origins. Clearly the acceptance of government funds by any voluntary organisation can be seen as a compromise for such organisations have chosen to establish themselves independently of government. By accepting government grants IMSE was bound by certain ties laid down by the government, for example, the appointment of individuals employed in the training programmes and the selection of students.

IMSE recognised that it could not match the resources that were available in government programmes, and that many government projects had the potential for considerable impact if they were implemented effectively. Therefore, IMSE regarded itself as having a responsibility to tap into such projects, partly to ensure their potential would be realised and partly to promote its own organisation. For example, with the mother and child health programmes this project was very important for ensuring primary health care and thus the physical well-being of the villagers. IMSE regarded this as important for humanitarian reasons and also recognised it as necessary if the people were going to be able to take on an increasing responsibility and actively work for their communities - perhaps through IMSE but not necessarily.

Moreover, in so far as IMSE was seen by the villagers to be concerned with their immediate welfare, the villagers were likely to be attracted to IMSE. It provided IMSE with an entry point to mobilise and organise the poor and generate awareness to demand quality services and accountability from the government, and it provided IMSE with a communication channel to ensure that

the government understood and responded to the needs of its citizens where it had the capacity to do so. From a JP perspective this approach was quite consistent. The JP Institute, for example, had undertaken a number of government sponsored programmes such as ICDS and anganwadi workers.

In order to apply for funding from the central government IMSE had to apply through the state government. It did not feel entirely confident about having to rely on the West Bengal Left Front government with which its relations tended to be rather strained. For example, in 1985 IMSE's Calcutta office telephone was out of order for five months and no attempt was made to repair it in spite of frequent reminders by IMSE. Eventually IMSE filed a case in the High Court which ordered the telephone company to repair the phone. It was subsequently repaired. IMSE attributed the failure of the company to repair the phone beforehand to a deliberate ostracism policy on the part of the CPI(M) towards IMSE.<sup>17</sup> There was no doubt that the CPI(M) was antagonistic towards IMSE, which was identified by an article published in the CPI(M)'s journal, The Marxist, as an organisation involved in an imperialist strategy specifically aimed at undermining the CPI(M)'s work.<sup>18</sup> For the moment IMSE felt that it was strong enough to resist any government threat. Indeed it had received notice to quit a number of areas in West Bengal by the CPI(M) which was the major party in the state coalition government, but it had not budged, and because of its popular support in those areas the CPI(M) let it be.

Nevertheless, IMSE's West Bengal district committee took a deliberate step to strengthen its position against the CPI(M) by moving into two other states, Bihar and Orissa. IMSE's registration in West Bengal under the state legislation, was valid on a national level and so in no way reduced its legitimacy

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with Biblap Halim, 14.8.1985, IMSE Calcutta Office.

<sup>18</sup> Prakash Karat, "Action Groups/Voluntary Organisations: A Factor in Imperialist Strategy", The Marxist, 2 (April - June, 1984): 19 - 54.

beyond the Bengali borders. The IMSE district committee chose two up-and-coming young IMSE members to go into Bihar and Orissa. Both of them were given the position of cluster secretary and they were effectively in charge of initiating IMSE operations in these states. While this movement into Bihar and Orissa expanded the organisation, it also consolidated its position as a voluntary organisation, giving it a national character, that was determined by its presence in three or more states. This being the case it could apply directly to the central government for central funding rather than being dependent on the West Bengal government. By moving into other states IMSE also aimed to strengthen its position against potential threats by any one state government. That it had done so was demonstrated in its High Court challenge against the Bihar state government. IMSE was given notice to quit Bihar by that state government but it resisted and took the case to the Bihar High Court. The ruling that ensued held that provided IMSE did nothing unlawful, it could not be dismissed. It was only because of the strong backing that it received from the West Bengal branch that it was able to take the firm stand against the Bihar government. However, it was not sufficiently confident to approach the Bihar or Orissa state governments for funding.

Meanwhile IMSE secured further its relationship with the central government by accepting its appointment as Nodal Agency for West Bengal. The central government appointed one Nodal voluntary organisation in each state, under its Department of Rural Development. Nodal agencies were voluntary organisations whose role was basically one of liaison between the government and other voluntary organisations. They were provided for specifically under the Seventh Plan as an arrangement to identify and evaluate local organisations for assistance. The concept had been developed because of a concern at the failure of government poverty alleviation programmes to be implemented effectively. The idea was that the people, that is, the poor people who were the

intended beneficiaries of many of these government schemes, had to be made aware of the schemes and encouraged to participate in them; and it was the task of the Nodal agencies to ensure this happened. In undertaking this responsibility the Nodal agencies were supposed to select other voluntary organisations who would organise the beneficiaries for awareness building. For IMSE this meant training organisers from other voluntary organisations which IMSE selected as suitable participants. The organisers then would mobilise groups and run awareness generating camps, and of course follow up their work.<sup>19</sup>

The idea of nodal agencies was abandoned later as groups tended to ignore them and apply direct to Delhi for funds but the fact that IMSE was chosen was symbolically important. It further secured IMSE's position vis a vis the government's. IMSE's appointment suggested an appreciation by the central government of IMSE's credibility. However, given IMSE's background and its attitude towards the state structure it seemed surprising that the central government should have chosen it, giving rise to possible speculation about the government's motivation, particularly in view of the strained relations between the Union and Bengal governments.

IMSE's role as Nodal Agency placed it in an invidious position as it involved further compromise with IMSE's ideology. IMSE rationalised its apparently reactionary position (from a Marxist view) of participating in government schemes because this course enabled it to have access to funds that it otherwise would not have had. Moreover it enabled it to influence the way in which those funds were used and ensured that they were not used for purposes that would

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<sup>19</sup> "Workshop on 'Organisation of Beneficiaries'", IMSE News Bulletin, VI (October-November 1986): 3 - 4.

counter its activities. However, participation in the Nodal agency scheme could have affected IMSE's future priorities particularly as regards challenging the state structure.

## V. SAREEK

### 1. Structure

The Society for the Advancement of Rural Economy, Education and Kultur was quite different to IMSE. It did not promote its own organisation. Instead it promoted local independent groups. Like IMSE, SAREEK was a registered body but unlike IMSE, SAREEK identified itself in terms of that official registered institution, that included the Board of Directors and the Calcutta headquarters group. Nevertheless, its organisational network extended beyond this structure; it operated in three project areas - Raidighi, Deula and Narayangarh - and encompassed local village organisations that were independent of SAREEK. SAREEK's role in this respect was one of a catalyst.

The Board of Directors was the supreme decision-making body and it was theoretically responsible for all final policy directions regarding the annual budget, field organisation, training programmes and the appointment of the director who was charged effectively with the ultimate control of the organisation. The director, Indrajit Samanta, formed the headquarters group consisting of five members. Each worker had his own area of responsibility but they were all familiar with each other's work so that SAREEK was not dependent on any one person for a particular job.

Basically SAREEK was involved in working with local youth clubs. Each club had a stated list of aims and objectives towards achieving the uplift of the people. Some groups were registered in their own rights but not all had direct registration. Registration brought financial benefits in that the clubs could more effectively mobilise resources through local government for club purposes. While they remained unregistered the clubs could still mobilise some local government funds but not as a club. Rather, individuals applied for funding, from a scheme under which they were entitled to benefit. They could do this with the support or encouragement, or even at the initiative of the local club. A club's involvement would depend on the extent to which it perceived the community as benefitting; for example, a club might have regarded pisciculture as a desirable project and the local government might have offered a course in the same. Then maybe a local youth would show an interest in the course and a willingness to share any knowledge gained. In such a case, the club would support that person's application. The resources could be utilised effectively for the benefit of the community.

Nevertheless the unregistered club was limited, but to become registered and remain registered required the drawing up of a memorandum of association, the completion of forms for the initial registration as well as the submission of annual returns. In these largely illiterate communities, club members often shied away from this type of responsibility.

All the SAREEK associated clubs were affiliated to a coordinating committee in their respective areas, that is the Udyog Parishad. The term, Udyog Parishad (People's Initiative Committee) was coined by SAREEK but the actual committees were developed by the local groups in their respective areas, albeit at SAREEK's behest. SAREEK explained that it was not prepared to provide

funding or training to the clubs unless they organised themselves in a coherent manner such that they could responsibly plan, coordinate and review their activities. Each club had one representative on its respective Udyog Parishad. The Udyog Parishads met about once every two months and more often if there was pressing business such as during harvest time. They took the responsibility for the establishment of grain banks in their respective areas, for the work of community health workers and the direction of the new education centres and for new initiatives in the area. Very local issues would be dealt with by the local clubs but sometimes these required wider support especially if there were financial considerations.

## 2. Participation

Originally SAREEK began with existing youth clubs whose primary functions were sporting and religious and SAREEK persuaded them to take up community work. The initial step of undertaking community work did not appear to have been difficult,<sup>20</sup> for these were the sorts of groups of whom Reverend Long spoke, reading newspapers and generally taking an interest in current affairs.<sup>21</sup> Since then SAREEK promoted the formation of other youth groups, based in the village or even hamlet. At first these groups were dominated by vested and middle class interests; however, poorer elements were increasingly attracted to these clubs. In some cases, this resulted in some of the original members deserting their respective groups.<sup>22</sup> Many new clubs were inspired by the work of existing clubs. The clubs were the grass roots of the organisational network that SAREEK was promoting. Within each project area SAREEK worked with about 30 groups of between 25 and 75 members,

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<sup>20</sup> Although resistance to means developed later, *infra*, this chapter.

<sup>21</sup> *Supra*, Chapter Four.

<sup>22</sup> Interviews with the SAREEK director at the Calcutta Office, 9/IF, Dr Suresh Sarcar Rd, Entally, Calcutta 14, 18.2.1985 and 29.8.1985.



averaging out at 40 to 41.<sup>23</sup> In Narayangarh the clubs consisted of both men and women. This was a tribal area and participation by the women was indicative of the comparatively more equal status afforded to tribal women within their own communities. In the other project areas, most of the clubs were male only, with a few separate mahila mandals (women's organisations). For example, in Raidighi there were 30 youth (male) groups and six women's organisations.<sup>24</sup>

The concept of separate mahila mandals raised problems such as those that occurred with the separate Harijan committees with which NBJK worked. Separate organisations were formed because the SAREEK workers saw the women, and the women perceived themselves, as being restrained from speaking out in mixed meetings; thus many more women became involved and they participated to a greater degree than they would have at mixed meetings. Furthermore, all women meetings could be held at times convenient for women whereas the times for the mixed meetings were generally set to suit men's working hours. It was thought that the women gained more confidence from their role in mahila mandals. Yet the prevailing social conditions emphasised the separate identity of men and women. It raised the question as to whether it would help bring about any equality between the sexes or whether it would serve to perpetuate the existing inequalities.

Nevertheless it must be noted that the mahila mandals were represented on the Udyog Parishad, that is, the higher level committees to which all village

<sup>23</sup> These figures were given with respect to Raidighi at a meeting consisting of the SAREEK director, another headquarters' member, the local field worker, representatives of local clubs and also instructors, health workers etc, 9.9.1985. I was then told by the Director that similar figures applied to the other two areas.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

committees sent a representative. The female representatives were accorded equal status with the men. However, there were not so many women as men because there were not so many mahila mandals. Prior to SAREEK's entrance there were no mahila mandals although there were quite a number of male only youth clubs. Thus it would seem that women were becoming more actively involved in community participation through these bodies.

SAREEK chose to begin its work with the existing youth groups as they had demonstrated already some interest in organisation. Also SAREEK believed that youths tended to be more active and enthusiastic as well as open minded and receptive to new ideas than elders. Thus like JP, SAREEK hoped to redirect the energy of the youth towards working for the uplifting of their communities. However, the youth groups presented problems for popular organisation. They were not the representative bodies that JP envisaged of his lok samitis, consisting of all the members of the respective villages. Initially, the youth groups associated with SAREEK tended to be dominated by middle class male youths and it is difficult to envisage how the whole village populace could be mobilised into this form of organisation. There was no suggestion that any other form of structure will be forthcoming through SAREEK apart from the Udyog Parishad. However, it also appeared that the clubs were expanding in participation and were adapting themselves as more and more people were being mobilised within the existing organisations and they were losing their middle class character,<sup>25</sup> although the majority of the populace tended to be spectators.

### 3. Field Workers

SAREEK employed one full-time and two part-time workers in each project area. The field staff were in addition to the headquarters group. They were

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<sup>25</sup> Interviews on 18.2.1985 and 29.8.1985

local youth chosen according to the ability and potential that they may have demonstrated for leadership qualities when SAREEK first became involved with their respective areas. Of course other potential leaders, often more dynamic, emerged later. The SAREEK projects were overseen by the field workers, who provided feedback to SAREEK. The full-time field workers also served as SAREEK's representatives on their respective Udyog Parishads. The field workers did not necessarily hold any positions of office on the committee. This was decided by the committee when it determined its office bearers.

Apart from the presence of the SAREEK worker each Udyog Parishad functioned independently of SAREEK although they could look to SAREEK for guidance, and of course if they sought SAREEK's financial assistance then SAREEK had the final say in the advancement of such a project. Most of SAREEK's funding through the Udyog Parishads went to provide honorariums for education instructors and health workers. However, as far as possible, SAREEK encouraged the Udyog Parishads, registered bodies in their own right, to mobilise resources for themselves. For example, with the education centres it was up to the villages to provide a suitable building and to find the necessary educational materials such as readers and writing materials. Some government funding was available for educational projects but it was up to the local organisations to make the necessary applications. Further, once a SAREEK funded project was initiated it was really controlled by the Udyog Parishad, with the SAREEK field workers playing only a general supervisory role. SAREEK funds were received directly by the treasurer of each committee. Each treasurer had to account for these funds to the respective field worker. Of course if the project did not meet expectations or certain conditions SAREEK could withdraw its funding but it did not try to use this power in any coercive fashion.

The new leadership structures that SAREEK encouraged bear a number of parallels to JP's ideas. JP wanted to mobilise the youths to provide leadership in the development of a new village committee structure. SAREEK was seeking to do the same although it envisaged the new village committees as developing from an expansion of the youth structures whereas JP saw the two working hand in hand. In effect SAREEK developed two levels of trained motivators; those involved with the headquarters group, and the new local leadership whom the headquarters group were trying to motivate. The headquarters group was very conscious of its role as motivator and the position of influence with which this placed it on the local scene. It was anxious to ensure that the local areas were not dependent on that influence and that they developed their own leadership structure through the youth groups and Udyog Parishads. The organisation work with which SAREEK was involved was quite separate at the local level, that is, quite separate from SAREEK's formal identity.

#### 4. Funding

SAREEK received some local donations for the running of its organisation and the cost of the projects, but most came from Bread for the World. It recognised the vulnerability of its dependence on foreign funds, in particular its dependence on only one agency. However, SAREEK hoped that the local groups would develop to the extent that they could continue to function without the need for outside funding. So whilst it did not aim to make its headquarters group self-sufficient, the emphasis at the local level was one of independence. From a JP perspective the important factor was that SAREEK emphasised the

mobilisation of local resources and that the existence of the Udyog Parishads was not dependent on access to SAREEK funds.

Meanwhile, members of the headquarters group were often hired by other organisations such as the Lutheran World service and the Rural Welfare Society. The latter organisation was initiated by a former SAREEK worker, S N Basu, who was anxious that SAREEK should start a project in his own area, Diamond Harbour. Instead, however, Indrajit Samanta urged him to form his own organisation after gaining valuable field experience with SAREEK and establishing relationships with some funding agencies. Although the versatility of the SAREEK workers sometimes left the office temporarily short-staffed, SAREEK believed that it benefited from any subsequent sharing of understandings, both in boosting morale and widening contacts.

## VI. COMPARISON OF ORGANISATIONS

A number of JP's ideas are applicable to the SAREEK situation, in particular his thoughts on a student vanguard and people's committees. SAREEK sought to actively promote a working together of youth groups and people's type committees. It harnessed the youth groups as the vanguard for its own revolutionary work although it was concerned that these groups be independent of it and that they had no formal organisational connections other than the local field workers and funding ties. The workers and organisation were local. The youth groups could be regarded as something akin to CYSV in that they served as catalysts to their communities. However, they differed from the CYSV in that instead of trying to establish separate people's committees SAREEK hoped that the youth groups themselves would expand into people's committees although there was little evidence that this was happening. There were some important differences between SAREEK and CYSV that may have helped to

make this possible, such as the fact that the youth groups were local groups whereas many of the CYSV activists did not work in local areas, nor had JP expected them to do so. JP regarded the CYSV as providing its members with a learning experience as well as giving them direction for their energies. In order to emphasise this educative role the CYSV placed restrictions on its membership. The youth groups associated with SAREEK did not. Instead their membership was apparently expanding although some social restrictions such as the participation of women could still occur. Nevertheless, women participated equally at the Udyog Parishad level.

Udyog Parishad, an umbrella organisation, was established at the district level and it enabled the local groups to meet together and provide each other with moral support as well as taking joint decisions with respect to their communities such as the formation of grain banks, which required the cooperation of a number of clubs. There were many similarities between SAREEK and Udyog Parishad on the one hand, and NBJK and Lok Samiti on the other, for just as SAREEK promoted Udyog Parishad, NBJK promoted the Lok Samiti with the aim of developing people's power. Lok Samiti represented a more structured and sophisticated organisation than Udyog Parishad in that it extended to the national level. Moreover, theoretically it was seeking to develop an alternative to the prevailing political structure of the modern idiom. However, in practice it served much along the lines of Udyog Parishad: disseminating information, sharing ideas and providing moral support. It did not commit the lok samitis to take a particular line, but by facilitating communication it assisted them to play a more effective role in the wider political structure.

CYSV and IMSE presented a much more fixed ideology and structure, but they were quite different from each other. The CYSV had a restricted membership so it did not seek to impose its ideology or structure on the community at large,

although JP hoped that it would provide direction to the wider community. IMSE was also concerned to pave a revolutionary path but it attempted to involve everyone within the fold of its organisation following any revolution through to its totality. In developing its revolutionary path, IMSE attempted to understand local situations so that it could gain local confidence and spread its ideology. It did this through a democratically centralised process that allowed for a two-way communication between the grass roots groups and the central organisation. All IMSE members had the scope to come forward with their views. IMSE pushed its ideology on its grass roots for it believed this ideology came from them and it was an integral part of the expansion and strengthening of the IMSE organisation. IMSE's ideas of organisation seemed to be akin to a non-violent Maoist view of the communist party rather than JP's voluntarist lok samitis. Mao believed that the party had to be fully consolidated ideologically, politically and organisationally with every communist having a duty to play an active part to build up the party forging close links between the progressive elements and the broad masses so as to fulfill his idea of: "from the masses to the masses".<sup>26</sup>

The CYSV also was concerned to develop appropriate strategies according to the situation and it did this by its workers living with the people with whom it worked. However, the CYSV did not have as comprehensive an approach as IMSE for the CYSV was not concerned to follow its revolution through to its totality. It regarded that as the role of organisations such as Lok Samiti and indeed it was JP's hope that the CYSV and Lok Samiti would work hand in hand to fulfill his 'total revolution'. Lok Samiti had provision for the involvement of the Vahini but the Vahini's participation was not apparent amongst the lok samitis associated with NBJK. In Bodh Gaya the CYSV had

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<sup>26</sup> Supra, Chapter One.

not connected with Lok Samiti. Instead it formed a separate organisation, the Mazdoor Kisan Samiti, which - like the CYSV - appeared to be concerned with mobilising people along a negative theme, for example, demonstrating against the injustices of the Matt.

Like JP, the CYSV, NBJK and Lok Samiti, SAREEK and the Udyog Parishad did not rely on the absolute spontaneity that Vinoba seemed to expect but nor did they demand and command loyalty in the way that IMSE did. Rather they concentrated on motivating and mobilising people and providing guidelines but not attempting to centralise their work. The difference was that the IMSE claimed to be working towards developing a complete alternative to the existing system, although it must be noted that IMSE's relationship with the government vis a vis funding and training programmes did not fit into this model. The others wanted to revolutionise the existing system by developing a new force, a people's force, which they seemed to regard as complementing the current system. Nevertheless, they did little to take over or replace the basic functions of government such as law and order and the provision of major infrastructure.

## VII. CONCLUSIONS

All four organisations offered structures that were quite distinct from political parties and in which a number of JP type ideas were manifested as the organisations served to strengthen the grass roots position. Their strength came from the horizontal and vertical links that they promoted. Horizontally they looked beyond their own organisations through workshops and affiliations, sharing knowledge and pooling resources. Within their own organisations they seemed to be developing vertical channels that provided for the reception and articulation of the needs and wishes of the people with whom they were involved, and they seemed capable of translating this into policies that could be



implemented effectively by those people themselves. There was still a large gap between theory and practice but this was the type of work that JP had in mind when he advocated a partyless democracy, and he realised that it would not be achieved overnight.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### EXPANDING LOKNITI THROUGH CONSTRUCTIVE WORK

This chapter briefly reflects on JP's ideas as to the means by which people should be mobilised towards lokniti and then considers the means employed by CYSV, NBJK, IMSE and SAREEK.

#### I. JAYAPRAKASH NARAYAN

JP's "total revolution" was based on lokniti, popular empowerment and consciousness-raising with a focus on self-reliance through local development. He envisaged steps being taken towards "total revolution" through the voluntarist idiom, mobilising people by way of constructive work, that is non-violent social, economic, political, cultural and ideological, and educational or spiritual programmes that educate and organise "the people so that they might by their own action change and better their condition of life".<sup>1</sup>

JP's concept of constructive work covered a multitude of ideas and was adapted according to locally identified basic needs such as: promoting village industry and village sanitation; overcoming sources of internal decay such as alcoholism; and changing people's hearts, for example with regard to encouraging inter-caste marriage and thus removing untouchability. Also he encouraged a gradual movement towards self-government, for example, by the resolution of local conflicts by mutual adjustments and generally reducing dependence on a centralised system of administration. Constructive work is an

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<sup>1</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "A Manifesto for Bihar", The Sunday Standard, 11 May 1975, reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol.4: Total Revolution, ed, Brahmanand (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1978), p.168

integral part of Gandhian philosophy although the approach to it has varied. This is the nature of constructive work and indeed of voluntarist politics, which depend on the prevailing conditions and situations. During Vinoba's bhoodan and gramdan campaigns the emphasis was on prapti work, which JP described as extensive and widespread. When JP retreated to Musahari he thought it appropriate to change this line to a more intensive and penetrating approach. He also recognised a need to revise the role of struggle through non-violent non-cooperation in pursuing constructive work.

## II. CYSV

The CYSV did not undertake constructive work in order to strengthen lokniti. It regarded that as requiring sustained effort to be undertaken in the long term. It saw its own work as more immediate, dealing with the prevailing injustices that prevented the growth of lokniti. These injustices were generally the result of rajniti. Consequently the CYSV focused its energies on opposing the state forces. JP had not expected the CYSV to undertake the totality of his revolution. Rather, he saw it as emerging in a leadership role both in so far as it directed the students and other youths, and in so far as it led the people towards change.

During the period of the JP movement, when the CYSV was founded, the challenge to change was seen to lie with struggling against the forces of rajniti. The CYSV maintained this line. With this perspective it was not interested in placing priority on undertaking any systematic constructive work programme. Any constructive work that it undertook in order to directly raise lokniti was incidental to its major work to oppose rajniti. Consequently its work should be understood in this light, and it would seem more appropriate to review it in the next chapter which focuses on the organisation's involvement with rajniti.

### III. NBJK

In examining NBJK there are two levels at which constructive work towards lokniti needs to be considered. These are at the level of the Institute itself, that is the Ashram; and secondly the work undertaken by the NBJK field workers with respect to their work with the lok samitis.

NBJK undertook a number of constructive work programmes that were independent of its work with the lok samitis. It was involved with legal aid; it had a homeopathic clinic; it ran a number of primary schools; it used its Ashram as an experimental farm; and it carried out relief work. All these were undertaken as services to the surrounding communities and it regarded them as in keeping with the sarvodaya service ideals. The work met important humanitarian needs. It also enabled NBJK to familiarise itself with the local areas so that it might better understand local situations. In addition the work was creative in that it provided scope for experimentation with appropriate farm technologies and medicine; this followed in the Schumacher tradition that JP admired, making for a comprehensive approach for working towards a "total revolution" when combined with the mobilisation strategies pursued by its field workers.

The field workers' main task was to mobilise people to establish lok samitis and then lend moral support to the established samitis. The first step was to raise awareness, but this was an ongoing task and did not end once the lok samitis had been established. A very important means of raising general awareness was NBJK's cultural team, comprising of a number of full-time workers who performed sketches, usually humorous, depicting typical misfortunes and

exploitations suffered by their audiences. The team demonstrated that these situations could be overcome if their audiences worked towards self-reliance and were not gullible to the tricks of charlatans who played on people's superstition and ignorance. Also the cultural team sang freedom songs, sometimes very provocative ones. Basically the team's efforts served a two-fold purpose. They started people thinking, raising awareness and they provided moral support and reinforcement as well as an entry point for NBJK workers so that they were able to introduce the concept of lok samiti.

At the village level the workers' task was one of more specific contact. They began by organising a village meeting, which was publicised widely and attempts were made to involve as many people as possible. The meeting served as a forum for starting the people to think about their situation, and for organising a lok samiti. In establishing a lok samiti the village would begin to mobilise itself. One of the most significant steps towards lokniti that the lok samitis represented was the breakdown of communal barriers. Ideally the lok samitis were representative of all local groups. However, this effect was not likely to be as far reaching in the Harijan lok samitis that were established by NBJK. Nevertheless NBJK workers believed that consciousness and confidence were being raised and communal barriers lowered as lower castes no longer seemed hesitant to sit with higher castes and raised, discussed and solved problems that faced their community as a whole.

Concern over the establishment of a brothel in their locality was a particular issue raised amongst some lok samitis quite independently of the NBJK workers. Their approach revealed a growing confidence and consciousness on the part of the lok samitis. The brothel had been established illegally while officials accepted bribes in order to turn a blind eye to its existence. The

villagers believed that its presence was detrimental to the society and they were concerned by its exploitation and degradation of the women who were associated with it.<sup>2</sup> The issue was raised in five neighbouring villages which subsequently collaborated and agreed to organise a public meeting on 21 September 1985. It was attended by five hundred people and a resolution was passed that the BDO was required to take action to stop the business within two months otherwise they would resort to direct action and physically remove the brothel themselves.

In effect the lok samitis represented a move towards self-government which was another important aspect of constructive work. This trend could be seen further in the concept of lok adalat which NBJK workers promoted. Lok adalat involved the local resolution of disputes. It was a relatively informal concept that might include a panel of objective observers to mediate while the disputing parties put forward their cases. A solution was sought by consultation between the mediators, the parties, friends and relatives who came to lend their support. The people's courts were more effective than the formal, expensive and often geographically distant legal system imposed by law and which often involved long delays. People's courts also effectively ended much of the corruption to which the villagers were subjected by the local judiciary. Moreover, it presented opportunities for villagers to manage their own affairs moving towards a "parallel administration" as JP had suggested.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This was raised at NBJK's monthly meeting Bahera Ashram, 30 September 1985. It also was raised by a number of NBJK field workers in their discussions with me on 1 October 1985.

<sup>3</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Important Changes", Everyman's, 3 August 1974, reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol.4:97.

#### IV. SAREEK

SAREEK promoted lokniti by raising awareness and organising people on two levels. Firstly, it sought to conscientise local youth groups, encouraging their development and extension as well as the formation of new groups. Secondly it aimed to have these groups educate their fellow villagers and mobilise them within the fold of their organisation.

Initially SAREEK workers from the headquarters group began by making informed contacts with existing youth groups. In many instances some contact already existed as some of the workers had worked in the areas previously, with other organisations. The aim of SAREEK workers was to motivate these groups beyond their narrow social objectives and sport orientation. Groups were encouraged to establish education centres in order to achieve a deeper level of consciousness-raising.

However, before these education centres were established SAREEK had each club that was interested in participating conduct surveys of their village or hamlet, for example with regard to land-ownership, occupations, service facilities and the location of these facilities. This survey served a two-fold purpose: raising the awareness of the participants with respect to their own communities as well as providing a basis on which to analyse the problems faced and devise strategies for their solution. After the surveys had been completed SAREEK reviewed them with the youths. The poorest area was determined from the findings and subsequently was suggested by SAREEK as the place where the education classes should be established. The idea, of course, was to involve as many of the most depressed people as possible as well as to draw their plight to the attention of the youths. Apparently this met with some resistance from some groups who were not interested in setting up

centres in such areas.<sup>4</sup> However, those groups that were prepared to follow SAREEK's lead received its support.

Nevertheless they were expected to be responsible for finding or constructing a suitable building as well as preparing their own teaching materials. In addition they were required to join forces with other groups in the area by forming some kind of body on which they were all represented, a body that was envisaged as strengthening the youth groups as they shared ideas, experiences and responsibility for the direction of their communities. For example, Udyog Parishad, which was established in each of the three areas where SAREEK worked, had an education committee which helped establish new classes, monitored the effectiveness of all classes and determined their direction.

The educational classes were central to SAREEK's strategy. On the one hand they educated the youth groups involved in running them, mobilising them into action and strengthening their organisational basis. On the other hand it provided an entry point into the rest of the community and enabled the youth clubs to share their increased awareness, involving greater participation from the larger community. SAREEK saw the education centres in terms of people's education as distinct from adult type education promoted by the government primarily to teach functional literacy. Functional literacy adult education classes had quite a long history in independent India but the country still had a low rate of literacy.<sup>5</sup> The main problem seemed to have been that the programmes were not relevant to the needs of the participants.<sup>6</sup> The assumption had been that education was the end goal but SAREEK approached it as though it were

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with the SAREEK director, Indrajit Samanta, at the Calcutta headquarters, 9/IF Dr Suresh Sarcar Rd, Entally, Calcutta, 18 February, 1985.

<sup>5</sup> According to the 1981 census, the literacy rate was 36.2%. This figure was published in Tata Services Ltd, Statistical Outline of India 1984, (Bombay: D R Rendse, 1984), p.30.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Professor Ahmed, Department of Adult Education, Xavier Institute of Social Services, Ranchi, Bihar, at XISS on 26 February 1985.



the means, believing that education was useless unless it could lead to social action. Learning only how to read and write was not sufficient. Therefore SAREEK concluded that it was important that education emphasised organisation and cooperation. It believed that the poor were powerless owing to the fact that they had no organisation. Thus the education centres were seen as stimulus, providing a forum for the dispersal of new ideas.

Historically had have been a number of movements of popular education in Bengali history. Perhaps the antecedent to these was Rammohan Roy's attempt to popularise Hinduism and promote English education. The renaissance which this precipitated was reflected in the growing importance of the vernacular press which gave a comprehensive coverage of current European and Indian affairs. Whilst numerical circulation of these papers was comparatively limited, the oral communication of their contents was widespread, for example through Kathaks, that is professional readers who would read to very large gatherings of villagers.<sup>7</sup> Popular songs were another powerful form of education throughout Bengal; they included religious, political and social topics such as the oppression of the indigo planters. Furthermore, Rabindranath Tagore undertook some very important experiments in education based on cooperation between students and teachers. He used the vernacular language and cultural tools such as song, dance and drama. Education was generally made relevant to day-to-day life while encouraging creativity to improve that day-to-day life. So SAREEK had a strong tradition on which to draw.

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<sup>7</sup> Reverend James Long in his testimony to the Indigo Commission appointed in Calcutta 1860, cited in John R McLane (ed), The Political Awakening in India (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1970), pp.30-36. Also *supra*, Chapter Four.

SAREEK sought to motivate and train club members to develop new ideas and share these through the education centres. During the slack times on the rural calendar, SAREEK held local training camps thus encouraging as many participants as possible. The emphasis of the camps was very much on self-reliance, and making use of local materials for teaching aids etc. In this way the theme of self-reliance, one stressed by JP, pervaded the education classes. Meanwhile constant contact between SAREEK and the youth clubs was maintained through seminars based on such themes as "social realities and people's reaction in the continent of Asia" as well as the newsletter, published in the Calcutta office and dealing with such topics as food additives and the anniversary of Hiroshima. The aim was to broaden the youths' horizons so that they might share their new ideas through the education classes and whatever other means they devised.

The youths were mobilised further through SAREEK's biannual self-evaluation programme, a participatory process that involved the drawing up of a draft questionnaire from the headquarters, which was then discussed with the three area workers, instructors, supervisors and voluntary workers. Subsequently the questionnaires could be revised accordingly. The evaluation was required by Bread for the World, the sponsors, but SAREEK found it invaluable as a learning and conscientising process. Basically the questionnaire began as an objective exercise, seeking to ascertain various data with respect to the situation of each community and the services available, land-ownership patterns etc. Then it sought to assess the community education centres. If any centre seemed to be failing according to the results of the questionnaire SAREEK's policy was to withdraw funding. However, it would reconsider this decision if the instructors proved sufficiently committed and continued regardless. The questionnaire then led on to questions concerning the types of activities in

which the centres were engaged, and then the changes and initiatives that had occurred as a result of the education programmes including conflicts, tensions and difficulties encountered. Local workers had no problem in completing the factual questions but often left the subjective type ones, dealing with goals and achievements, blank. In these cases SAREEK returned the forms to the groups for completion.

The local workers were responsible for tabulating the results. This was often a lengthy process as they could be caught up in harvest or other busy agricultural activities. However, the SAREEK office believed that for it to undertake the evaluation, instead of the local workers, in the name of efficiency, was not justified as the learning process outweighed any considerations of efficiency. SAREEK regarded it as an integral part of its conscientising and mobilisation programme. The assessment generated a sense of responsibility as the workers were forced to think about what they had done, their achievements and failures. It also gave them a basis on which to determine future priorities.

Some groups combined to form a number of cultural teams, which gave performances in neighbouring areas. Themes included social awareness such as conservation and health as well as providing moral guidance about overcoming fear of moneylenders etc. Thus the teams served as another entry point for raising consciousness and they believed that they were successful. Firstly they cited the fact that their performances were becoming more popular. There were greater demands for their services, usually from education centres, and each time they returned, the audiences seemed larger. Secondly they observed that people were going to clinics and hospitals more often; also they were making an effort to keep ponds clean and were not using the same ponds for humans as were used for animals.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, SAREEK mobilised the

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with the Raidighi cultural team, Raidighi, 7 September 1985.

cultural teams in so far as it trained the performers in such practicalities as prop, puppet and costume making, script writing, etc, again emphasising self-reliance making use of whatever materials were available locally.

Another programme that some groups undertook in order to further their education task was the formation of science clubs. The science clubs provided a new avenue for exposing local people to new ideas ranging from their environment with its floods and droughts, to atomic warfare, attempting to link the macro with the micro. In promoting an understanding about the nature of things, the clubs also hoped to overcome superstitions and ignorance that resulted in practices that threatened people's health and could entail enormous expenditure, such as employing charlatans who often charged extortionate sums for dubious practices.

In order to mobilise people into some form of organisation, SAREEK built on the existing organisational structure of the youth clubs, widening their scope and expanding the actual organisations through the Udyog Parishad. The Udyog Parishad was a new initiative that provided all member clubs, including women's groups, with equal representation. It gave the clubs an opportunity to share ideas, pool resources, and participate in joint decision-making exercises.

Initially SAREEK played a greater role in the determination and supervision of programmes. However, like NBJK it was disappointed with the results of this approach. It realised that projects had to be determined locally if they were to be managed locally. For example, one negative experience involved a fishing cooperative that SAREEK promoted in the Raidighi area, and for which it provided some funds after the 1978 tidal wave destroyed many of the fishermen's assets. The government also subsidised the scheme. Boats were

built and nets were made, and under SAREEK's guidance the cooperative flourished. However, the cooperative became too ambitious. It bought a motor launch against SAREEK's advice, although SAREEK agreed to help in negotiating the purchase of the launch. Unfortunately the cooperative was not equipped for this type of asset management and as a result it went into debt and effectively disbanded. There were some attempts to revive this scheme including requests to SAREEK to assist in the purchase of a new launch. SAREEK resisted this involvement although it encouraged a number of small non-formal fishing cooperatives in the area, and they seemed to be working well. SAREEK became very wary about investing in, directing, or interfering with any economic projects. Nevertheless, it recognised the motor launch experience as a valuable one in helping it to understand the limitations of its role.

SAREEK continued to play some role in a number of projects but it emphasised local initiative and responsibility. For example it encouraged the establishment of grain banks and was prepared to advise groups on this issue. Generally a grain bank was the joint project of a number of villages. It was a cooperative that provided villagers with a means to secure their grain until such time as they needed it. Loans were made and interest rates were accrued and charged. It provided an alternative to services offered by moneylenders whose practices were often exploitative. The grain bank concept represented a variation of swadeshi for on the one hand it served to reduce the grip of the moneylender and on the other hand it built up the local economy and generated cooperation and community spirit.

SAREEK was also involved with health projects, providing funds for the employment of locally-based community health workers. However, the

responsibility for appointing and supervising the workers lay with the Udyog Parishads. Basically the main concern of the health workers was one of relief and their services were necessary in view of inadequate government facilities. They also served as an entry point into poorer sections of the communities. The importance of health was generally recognised, and it was an issue that was pursued through the education centres and by the cultural teams.

The youth groups and Udyog Parishads depended on SAREEK's financial support to their education and health programmes, as well as its guidance in many other matters. Nevertheless it appeared that they began determining many priorities for themselves and accepting responsibility for their undertakings. One venture that was quite independent of SAREEK was a campaign for fair prices. This involved a number of farmers in an anchal in the Sundarbans. The farmers banded together in order to be able to take appropriate action to achieve higher prices for their crops of bhindi. They were receiving only thirty paise per kilogram and the wholesalers refused to pay more. The farmers could not afford to stockpile their produce so they hoped to find an alternative buyer. However, the wholesalers, who were based on the main road to Calcutta, threatened to prevent trucks carrying the farmers' crops from passing. Nevertheless, the farmers continued their action. First they approached the police and BDO to warn that there might be trouble. The next step was to go to Raidighi where the farmers sold directly to the consumers. However, this was only a temporary arrangement as the market was limited, and the farmers had neither the time nor expertise to continue their own marketing. Consequently one of their number went to Calcutta in search of a new buyer who was found. Arrangements were made to ship the produce from Raidighi rather than truck it, and so a confrontation with the wholesalers on the road was avoided. This particular struggle arose largely as a result of concern voiced during the discussions at local education centres, and it demonstrated a growing spirit of cooperation.

## V. IMSE

Like SAREEK, IMSE's lokniti work focused on consciousness raising which was centred around its education centres. It differed from SAREEK in that IMSE's education centres were an integral part of its own organisation, not a part of any separate organisational structure that it was trying to promote. IMSE's classes served as an entry point into the communities and their chief purpose was to conscientise these communities, making them aware of the causes of poverty, bringing them closer together in order to work for a solution. IMSE was influenced by Paulo Freire's work, and undertook much pioneering in the area of adult education, receiving some government grants for its work.

IMSE's classes evolved around a literacy programme, designed according to IMSE's own concepts of literacy. Literacy started with a sentence - a sentence that everyone could understand, and more importantly was related to their day-to-day situations, in particular the problems that they faced. For example, it may have related to dowry, moneylending, drinking, minimum wages, poverty. Then from the sentence students went to the word and then to the letter. This system was designed to increase students' awareness and help them to learn far more quickly as it gave meaning to what they were learning.

In the Santal area, Bihar, the local IMSE recruits had to develop their materials from scratch as the Santal tribals had no script. Consequently, they adapted Santali to the Hindi script and then devised what they considered to be appropriate learning materials. The first reader had a picture on each page with a descriptive sentence underneath. For example, a picture of a fat rich man

beside a poor thin man: "there are two classes - haves and have-nots". Under the sentence came the words and then the individual letters. Posters to match the reader pictures were printed too. The second reader also had pictures but rather than simple sentences each picture was accompanied by a short story. Moreover the pictures and stories tended to be of a more constructive nature, dealing with ways of overcoming the problems faced by the people such as establishing grain banks and setting up open courts. Discussion was generated over every issue raised. Magic lanterns also were used with slides of the same or similar pictures, and these shows provided an opportunity to reach larger and wider audiences.

IMSE's aim was to raise the students' level of consciousness from being submissive and fatalistic to being aware of the injustices perpetrated against them. Then having developed the students' observation skills, the education sought to develop analytical ones, generating a desire by the students to determine their own future. In helping the students clarify their socio-political position IMSE drew on Freire's "dialogue" and Mao's idea of taking the ideas of the masses back to the masses.

However IMSE assumed quite a deal of direction in so far as it was responsible for projecting the initial ideas from outside. This gave rise to the possibility of IMSE workers having so much control that they were able to direct the efforts of their classes towards apparently desirable goals. This use of what Freire termed "liberation propaganda" appeared to be IMSE's way. It could also be seen in the manner in which IMSE ran its training camps, such as the ones it held for education instructors. Each morning the camp began with an assembly where the students received a brief lecture and then sang the IMSE song that told how people could liberate themselves from exploitation by joining with



IMSE. IMSE's approach contrasted with Freire's position which was more one of facilitation, under which the community organiser's role was a coordinating one to draw out people's ideas in action reflection type of sessions.

IMSE's main concern was to mobilise people towards an alternative society, a socialist society, and it saw this as best being achieved through the expansion of its organisation at the village level. Anyone who became convinced of IMSE's objectives was entitled to join. Members were expected to be actively committed. They included mainly labouring classes and small peasant classes but those from the middle classes were welcomed provided that they accepted IMSE's wages, agreeing for example to pay minimum wages and not doing anything that would compromise themselves in their commitment to IMSE. This attitude towards the middle classes was similar to that of Freire towards converted oppressors.

IMSE members were mobilised from the village level committee, and the organisation extended to the district level, where major decisions concerning IMSE were taken. It regarded its strength as the expansion of its organisation at the grass roots level, lending support to and legitimising its decisions. Through its structure IMSE aimed to develop something of a parallel government, and an alternative society; this was different to JP's idea of people's government that was to ensure that the people had effective control over their government.<sup>9</sup>

Many village level projects were undertaken under the auspices of the village level committees. These committees were involved in the education and health worker projects as well, assuming responsibility for their operation at the

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<sup>9</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan Towards Total Revolution, vol.4:117.

village level. Other programmes included establishing grain banks, which, as an example of liberation-type propaganda, were described by an IMSE worker, at an adult education training programme, as being like a mosquito net protecting villagers from the money lenders' sting just as the net protected one from the sting of mosquitoes.<sup>10</sup>

Other forms of cooperatives were also undertaken such as village and cottage based industries jointly purchasing large assets that assisted their production such as weaving looms, and various joint farming societies based on fish culture, poultry or piggeries whereby members shared the costs of stock and feed as well as the labour involved in maintaining and developing their livestock. IMSE provided some legal and financial training for the operation of such cooperatives. IMSE believed that the rural economy could be developed and strengthened only through this type of group action for it held that the ideal of "land to the tillers" was not sufficient without financial support and this could not be achieved while farmers worked individually.<sup>11</sup> This appeared to be along the lines of JP's communitarian society. Further IMSE encouraged the development of village-based people's courts - lok adalat - in order to resolve local disputes at the local level. This type of development would help avoid the long delays and costs associated with legal action, which often meant travelling long distances and involved procedures quite foreign to most villagers. Thus it would promote the type of independence from the bureaucracy that JP advocated. However, IMSE's aim was for these programmes to create a socio-psychological infrastructure that would ensure a receptive atmosphere in which a struggle for IMSE's alternative society could be generated.

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<sup>10</sup> Hasakul Islam at the IMSE training programme for education instructors, IMSE office, Santal Parganas, Bihar, 30.1.1985.

<sup>11</sup> "Joint Farming Society organised at the Initiative of IMSE Workers", IMSE NEWS BULLETIN, IV (February 1985):3.

## VI. CONCLUSION

JP had envisaged the development of local organisational structures through which people could develop something of a parallel administration and work towards some degree of self-government. This was something of a departure from Vinoba's way for Vinoba concentrated on prapti work and there was no attempt to consolidate it through organisational work. Vinoba's way was to seek to change the hearts of the oppressors so that they might change their ways to ensure a just society.

The most important facet of constructive work for lokniti pursued by IMSE, SAREEK and NBJK, through the lok samitis, was consciousness raising through organisation, that is developing an organisational structure based on cooperation and the mobilisation of local resources. This was undertaken through a variety of socio-economic and even struggle programmes. By concentrating on organisational work, IMSE, NBJK and SAREEK placed the onus of responsibility for change on the oppressed sectors. They were urged to be independent of the prevailing power structures so that they could take control of their lives, such as doing without any branches of government administration that they did not need. For example, the concept of lok adalat represented a move towards parallel administration. It involved people whose participation in the alien court system would serve to perpetuate it, whereas their avoidance of it contributed towards taking away its reason for being. Cooperatives and grain banks similarly served as steps to self-government while challenging and weakening the power of moneylenders and middle men.

People's participation and mutual cooperation also facilitated their active struggle against perceived injustices that they suffered, such as the prices received by the SAREEK bhindi growers for their crops. IMSE systematically worked to generate an atmosphere of struggle right from the beginning of its literacy programmes. The readers that it developed demanded that its students recognised the unjust situations that they faced, provoking them to feel a sense of injustice and making them determined to overcome these situations.

JP had come to believe that some struggle was necessary to generate psychological forces so as to attract people and drive them to accept challenges to change themselves and others. In advocating the use of struggle JP departed from post-Gandhi Gandhian practice. Vinoba had emphasised gentle persuasion to remove the prevailing social disparities so as to move towards lok swaraj. However, JP thought that whilst this approach had brought about "some remarkable moral changes in some individuals" it was largely ineffectual.<sup>12</sup> It was not a total approach which was what JP believed was needed. JP's "total revolution" was based on a faith in man and his potentialities for self-government. Therefore he reasoned all men should be involved in striving towards that goal. In so far as the restructuring necessitated overcoming clashes of interest and the attitudes that maintained them, then resistance and struggle were likely unless the immediate cooperation of everyone was secured. In doing this JP had come to realise that it was not enough to work for lokniti at the micro level, building up people's power. He thought it was necessary also to work at the macro level at which rajniti operated for rajniti was the main clash of interest with lokniti. The next chapter will concentrate on the theme of diminishing rajniti through the voluntarist idiom, thus bringing the voluntarist idiom beyond the margin of wider politics.

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<sup>12</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, 18 August 1975, Prison Diary (Popular Prakashan: Bombay, 1977), p.22

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### GOOD GOVERNMENT

#### I. INTRODUCTION

The most significant aspect of JP's rethinking on the Gandhian legacy was his focus on the macro-political system and his aim to have people directly participate in changing the state. He envisaged this as being achieved through the participatory party-less lok samiti structure, with its emphasis on the macro level. On the one hand he hoped this would gradually develop an alternative political structure, under which effective decision making would rest with the basic grass roots level, who would control the selection of delegates to secondary institutions and ensure their accountability. This system would place considerable responsibility on the village committees, requiring them to direct and support their representatives. JP believed that if people had a proper understanding of the nature of such a system then they would assume their responsibilities and obligations and it would run smoothly.

However he also realised: firstly that people did not yet have this understanding; and secondly, that they lived and operated within a different structure, that of rajniti based on representative party democracy in the modern idiom. JP knew that his ideal of raising lokniti could not be achieved overnight, and that it could only be a step by step process in which it was necessary to take cognisance of the existing structure so that it might gradually be transformed. He thought that the lok samiti structure could be used for this end also, for he envisaged it as serving as a two way channel of communication between the existing state structure and the grass roots. It could facilitate the

active involvement of people in the implementation of government programmes designed for their benefit such as health, education and economic type programmes. In addition, it could link village level groups to form mass movements prepared to struggle against any injustices perpetrated by the modern state structure, such as corruption and bureaucratic inefficiency. Thus JP hoped that power would be increasingly decentralised from the state to the people, diminishing rajniti. So in effect he sought an essential role for the saintly idiom within the operation of the modern one.

This chapter explores the relationships between CYSV, NBJK and Lok Samiti, IMSE and SAREEK with the state structure, and their attempts to reduce its power by extending the active lokniti component of macro level politics beyond simply voting.

## II. CYSV

JP thought students had no vested interest in the continuance of the existing system. Thus he regarded them as being able to form an ideal revolutionary vanguard working to reduce rajniti. Launched against the background of the Emergency, the CYSV's initial task was to inform people about and mobilise them towards democracy, seeking to purify the government by demanding its resignation and mobilising support for the honest candidates, seen to be represented within the Janata party. The 1977 election was regarded as a vote for democracy or dictatorship.

After 1977 India did not face quite the same crisis and therefore the role of elections did not receive so much attention. However, the CYSV maintained the ideal of supporting the most honest candidate. Also CYSV excluded

candidates from communal parties as well as Congress (I) and CPI.<sup>1</sup> Its aversion to communal parties was understandable as communalism ran against the very grain of "total revolution". However, CYSV's prejudice against Congress (I) and its Emergency ally, CPI, were historical. This ran counter to JP's idea that actions should be against the evil that had to be fought rather than against any individual group or party<sup>2</sup> for the CYSV seemed to be working specifically against the Congress (I) and the CPI rather than any perceived evil.

Whilst JP had seen the 1977 election as a crossroads to dictatorship or democracy he generally regarded elections as providing only a superficial role to voters in a popular democracy. He wanted the electorate more actively involved by other means in order to keep a constant vigilance over the workings of good government. Thus in the wake of the Janata victory the Vahini needed a new issue around which it could mobilise support in order to make the people aware of prevailing injustices and organise them so as to overcome them.

The situation in Bodh Gaya provided the youths with this opportunity for they believed that the Shankara Matt, who was based there, epitomised the injustices suffered in rural Bihar due to government inaction. It applied to all rural India and clearly demonstrated the need for reform. The Shankara Matt, one of the most powerful religious trusts in Bihar, was based in Bodh Gaya and during the course of the movement JP had drawn attention to the injustices associated with the Matt, claiming that the Matt held thousands of acres of surplus land.<sup>3</sup> Both Gandhi and JP had seen land as the central issue on the rural scene.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Shekwara Villagers, 29.9.1985.

<sup>2</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Moral Regeneration, A Role for You", Everyman's, 29.2.1973, reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol.4:32-33.

<sup>3</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Moral Regeneration: A Role for You", Everyman's, 2.9.1973. Reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol.4: 166.

<sup>4</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "The Land Grabbers", (1965). Reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol.3: India and the Problems, ed., Brahmanand (Bombay: Popular

For its part the Matt was the largest land-holder in the Gaya district but there was no separate or complete record of its holdings. The Matt admitted to holding only five hundred acres which was within the permissible land ceiling.<sup>5</sup> However, it seemed to be accepted fairly widely that the Matt held considerably more property, quite illegally through benami transfers etc.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the Matt employed most of the landless Harijans in the area, paying them less than the minimum wage. As far as the Mahant was concerned there was no question as to whether the labourers had a right to education and good health let alone the right to own land, or sow, reap and harvest the crops for themselves. He simply did not regard these as issues, explaining quite uncompromisingly that "clothes, food and shelter" were the most important needs of the people.<sup>7</sup> All else was apparently irrelevant. Thus the Matt demanded total obedience from its workers and refused to surrender its surplus land.

Consequently the CYSV believed this situation highlighted the need for struggle and at the same time it provided an ideal opportunity for a campaign as attention focused on only one land-owner, thus reducing any confusion in directing the labourers' grievances. Work had begun already in the area for in 1974-5 under the leadership of two JP supporters, Jagannathan from Tamil Nadu and his wife Krishnamma, attempts were made to mobilise the villagers to make complete records of the land holdings in their respective areas. They faced resistance from the Matt's men and also the police.<sup>8</sup>

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Prakashan, 1978): 126 - 132.

<sup>5</sup> Social Justice and Legal Support Cell, AVARD, "GREEN ACRES OR RED: Bhoomi Andolan in Bodh Gaya", GREEN ACRES OR RED?, (New Delhi: AVARD, 1980), p.1.

<sup>6</sup> eg Sudip Mazumdar, "Matt destroys Harijans' paddy crop", in AVARD, GREEN ACRES OR RED?, p.42.

<sup>7</sup> Harji Malik, "Whose crop The Destitute or the Deity?", in AVARD, GREEN ACRES OR RED? pp.50-58.

<sup>8</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Total Revolution: Its Concept", pp.155-6.



Thus it was that the Vahini came to the area in 1978. Their first task was to raise awareness about the issue and win support from the people. So Vahini full-timers moved into the area, living with the people and establishing a base at Shekhwara, a few kilometers from Bodh Gaya. In order to give a comprehensive picture they needed to take a total approach to the situation and tackle a broad spectrum of issues, including, for example, the problem of drinking. Alcoholism was rife among labourers, especially the men. This contributed to numerous problems such as poor health and domestic violence and it hindered their participation in any movement as it left them weak and divided, a fact that the Matt seemed to appreciate fully as it freely distributed the ingredients from which the liquor was made, encouraging drinking and effectively maintaining a subservient labouring class. Therefore the CYSV worked to raise consciousness about alcoholism and its associated problems, at the same time exposing the Matt's role. Women, especially, were urged to take up this cause, dissuading their husbands from drinking, boycotting their husbands and homes if the drinking persisted.

The Vahini youth began their struggle to obtain the Matt's surplus land by issuing a leaflet declaring that the Matt's possession of the land was illegal and stating that the Matt's workers had been turned into slaves. They also held informal discussions and organised village meetings to promote the issue. This was reinforced by their encouraging the formation of mazdoor kisan samitis, which were to be the struggle committees around which the Bodh Gaya land movement would pivot. More than fifty villages in the Gaya district took the initiative to form mazdoor kisan samitis, consisting of local workers and small farmers. Thus under the leadership of the Vahini they came together under the banner of "land to the tiller" and they decided to take a firm stand, refusing to

work for the Matt in support of their claims for the redistribution of the surplus lands. The Matt responded with threats and brought in outside labourers, against whom the Mazdoor Kisan protested. The CYSV and Mazdoor Kisan Samiti also took possession of some of the Matt's lands which were lying fallow because of their refusal to work. They worked these cooperatively but also met with considerable opposition from the Matt as it sent its goondas to terrorise the people.<sup>9</sup> Violent clashes resulted.

Meanwhile JP, who was the CYSV's supreme leader, became alarmed at the deteriorating situation and he urged the Bihar government to enquire into the agrarian movement in Bodh Gaya. The Saxena Committee was set up to look at the Matt's land-holdings and submitted its report on 10 October 1980. On 26 November 1980 the Government of Bihar accepted that the Matt was in possession of 8687.54 acres.<sup>10</sup> In its report the committee had spelt out many important recommendations with regard to the violence and atrocities; however, little action was taken by the government although some land was recovered in two blocks. It was surrendered to the government which redistributed it through block offices in cooperation with the villagers which were led by the mazdoor kisan samitis. Nevertheless the Matt still possessed considerable lands and the general struggle continued. It was only in September 1987 that the High Court of Bihar ruled against the remainder of the Matt's land, ordering that it could keep only one hundred acres and that the rest was to be distributed by the government of Bihar.

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<sup>9</sup> This is well documented in: the AVARD report, Neshat Quasier, "Youth and Peasant Movement: A Case Study of Bodh Gaya Struggle", The Other Side, (New Delhi) 4 (1984) 12 - 19; and also in Anirudh Prasad, People's Perception of Harijan Atrocities in Bihar, (Patna: A N Sinha Institute of Social Studies, 1983).

<sup>10</sup> Quasier, "Youth and Peasant Movement", p. 16.

The Vahini maintained a strong presence in the area and was concerned to continue the struggle through the organisation of village meetings and provoking the people to action. As a consequence much of the Matt's land lay fallow for the labourers refused to work it. By offering satyagraha they sought to prevent others from working too. This was not a satisfactory situation, as JP previously lamented: it was a sad waste to see land lying fallow in a poor state where 80.5% of the total workers were employed in agriculture and yet the state still fell short of its minimum requirements of food grains.<sup>11</sup> There were other problems too. For example, there were very few opportunities for alternative employment open to the displaced labourers who refused to work the Matt's land, and in many cases those who received redistributed land could not afford to work it. Consequently many of them went to the towns and sought work in the secondary sector such as rickshaw pulling or road and construction work where they were at the mercy of contractors. Some turned to begging.<sup>12</sup> Others started to brew liquor again.<sup>13</sup> All this diverted their energies away from the main struggle.

As the vanguard of the revolution the CYSV saw its role as very much one of watchdog, that is watching out for any injustices caused or allowed by the prevailing system of government. Bodh Gaya was a case in point. Firstly the Matt's land-holdings demonstrated the inequalities on the rural scene. Secondly, and more importantly, they demonstrated the government's failure to act against these inequities. The Matt held most of its land illegally and yet the government did not make any attempt to enforce the law. Moreover when the

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<sup>11</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "A Manifesto for Bihar", The Sunday Standard, 11.5.1975, reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol.4: 172-3.

<sup>12</sup> Prasad, People's Perception of Harijan Atrocities, p. 42.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Shekwara villagers, who were also members of Mazdoor Kisan Samiti, Samanvay Ashram, 29.9.1985. Translator: Dwarko Sundrani, Samanvay Ashram, Bodh Gaya.

people protested and the Matt responded with brute force, the police allowed this to happen.<sup>14</sup> After the state government undertook to redistribute the Matt's surplus lands the CYSV played an important monitoring role.

However, the CYSV's watchdog role was not reinforced by any systematic constructive programme beyond that connected to its goal of forcing the surrender of the Matt's surplus lands. The CYSV did not regard it as its role to undertake a comprehensive constructive work programme. However, Gandhi had stressed the importance of the connection between constructive work and satyagraha. He said: "civil disobedience without the backing of the constructive programme can never lead us to independence. Shorn of it, civil disobedience becomes a method of violence bound to prove ineffective in the end".<sup>15</sup> The ideological split that occurred within the Vahini in 1985 supported the merit of this argument. Nevertheless CYSV deliberately neglected some areas that JP regarded as important; for example, it left land uncultivated rather than allow the Matt possession of that land. This contradicted JP's concern not to upset production. Similarly Mao had stressed that economic construction was necessary to sustain any prolonged struggle. Mao held that it was wrong to think that there was no time for this sort of work because meeting the practical needs of people was essential to revolutionary work. Indeed whilst JP had come to emphasise the role of struggle, his "total revolution" assumed the continuation and expansion of other forms of constructive work. Certainly he envisaged that the Vahini should direct its energies more towards struggle but he also thought that it would work more closely with broader constructive programmes such as that that the Lok Samiti undertook.

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<sup>14</sup> See for example Sudip Mazumdar, "Armed Police Terrorise Bodh Gaya Landless", Express News Service, reprinted in GREEN ACRES OR RED? pp. 46 - 49.

<sup>15</sup> M K Gandhi, "Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place", 13.12.1941, reprinted in Gandhi, The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, vol. X (Ahmedabad: The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Government of India, 1963), p. 137.

The Vahini took up work in other areas but Bodh Gaya was its first major experiment in intensive work for the education and organisation of people into organs of struggle. Bodh Gaya remained its major focus. Although it may have had some far reaching implications the work was limited. For example, it focused upon, or rather against, one particular body, the Bodh Gaya Matt. This seemed to go against JP's earlier directions that action be directed against the evil that has to be fought, rather than against any individual group or one party,<sup>16</sup> though of course the Matt was seen to epitomise injustice on the rural scene just as Mrs Gandhi's Congress had come to symbolise the impurities of government. Thus although the work in Bodh Gaya might have been limited, the Vahini viewed it as an important experiment in social revolution amongst the masses and as a catalyst to action on the rural scene. Indeed this was how JP envisaged the work of the CYSV which he regarded as the revolutionary vanguard. It was never seen to represent the whole revolution, which he thought would be more along the lines of janata sarkar or lok samiti the work of which was to educate and organise the people to take responsibility for their own affairs, at the same time struggling against injustices that impeded their progress.

### III. NBJK AND LOK SAMITI

#### 1. Elections and the Party Process

JP had foreseen an active and continuous role for people in the working of government through the lok samitis. He hoped that lok samiti activities would include choosing and supporting candidates for election. NBJK tried to

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<sup>16</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Moral Regeneration", pp.32 - 33.

mobilise the support of the lok samitis for a Janata party candidate in the 1984 General Election. Strictly speaking NBJK could not become involved in government elections because of its terms of registration. However, the NBJK members took leave from the organisation so as to overcome this technicality. The candidate whom they supported in 1984 was a follower of JP and originally he had planned to stand as an independent. Later he joined the Janata party ticket believing that this would improve his chances and the members of the NBJK maintained their support for him. NBJK failed to mobilise the people and the candidate was not successful. It seemed that the electorate was not interested in elections or it was afraid. Instead the elections were determined by influential people with money and goondas who captured polling booths so that even those who wanted to cast their votes were prevented. In addition it was thought that many of those who were able and had wanted to vote had been moved by Mrs Gandhi's assassination.<sup>17</sup>

There are two factors here: firstly that the NBJK supported candidate was defeated and secondly that NBJK had very little effect at all. People did not relate their lok samitis to the political structure. Moreover the election experience resulted in scepticism amongst lok samiti members regarding NBJK's motives. They thought that it was not possible to work for both the poor and politics and that power politics and development were quite different concepts. Thus NBJK's participation gave rise to a competing identity. Consequently it had to rethink its role and whilst it did not eliminate the possibility of participating in elections again, it had no immediate plans. The December 1984 elections demonstrated that there had been a failure by people in the area where NBJK was working, to link the wider political structure to their situation.

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<sup>17</sup> Prabhunath Sharma, Secretary NBJK, Bahera Ashram, 2.10.1985.

JP had seen a role for the lok samitis in choosing people's candidates, honesty being the most important selection criteria. The essence of the concept was to focus on the person, not the party. NBJK did this but the lok samitis were not involved in the selection process. They did not choose any delegates to be responsible for nominating candidates as JP had suggested or have any other say in the candidate. It was NBJK's decision and effectively amounted to an hierarchical imposition. In these circumstances the people could not be expected to relate the Janata candidate and the election to the people's committees. It was no wonder that they saw a competing identity. Power politics as they understood it was quite removed from their situation and presumably this situation would not have appeared any different. No matter that the candidate was honest, the point was that he was not their candidate.

## 2. Awareness of and Participation in Government Programmes

In order to develop people's awareness to the extent that they will confidently put forward people's candidates, JP had envisaged their role as watchdog being developed. This role would enable them to gain experience in an understanding of the workings of government. Lok Samiti emphasised this and its major approach (as well as that of NBJK through the lok samitis), was to publicise people's rights and entitlements, government reforms and programmes from which people might benefit. For example NBJK workers promoted various government schemes designed to benefit specific disadvantaged groups. The provision of cheap credit facilities was an important scheme as lack of credit was a binding constraint preventing the conversion of poor economically non-viable households into economically viable ones. Access to credit facilities gave the beneficiaries some degree of independence from money-lenders or

employers as well as boosting their confidence. The NBJK workers often assisted potential beneficiaries in their applications, at least initially. Now it seemed that many villagers, both men and women, who were involved with the lok samitis in NBJK's area, were approaching the Block and bank offices themselves; this suggested that their confidence and independence were growing.<sup>18</sup>

### 3. Struggle

Sometimes the people came up against bureaucratic inertia delaying receipt of their rights, or corruption within the government offices as officials demanded some consideration for the provision of facilities. Usually when this occurred the first step taken was to report the problem to the Block Development Officer (BDO), the Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO), and finally to the District Commissioner. Both the Lok Samiti infrastructure and the availability of the NBJK workers played an important role here in assisting claimants to go through these motions. Often satisfaction could be achieved in this manner but if it not, the next step was to continue the process through agitational activity, in particular organising processions demonstrating against, and thus drawing people's attention to the injustices perpetrated. Such demonstrations were organised by the peasants themselves with the NBJK workers perhaps having created the awareness and confidence for such a venture. In accordance with NBJK's registration with the state government, its workers were not supposed to demonstrate against the government or take political action. Nevertheless, the people, both men and women, seemed sufficiently enthused to carry on alone.<sup>19</sup> Similar types of action were undertaken when problems of non-payment of minimum wages occurred or when people were refused treatment at the hospital unless they paid a bribe.

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<sup>18</sup> Interviews with NBJK workers, Bahera Ashram, 1.10.1985.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.



The effectiveness of the lok samitis against local corruption resulted in the authorities taking increasing notice of their demands. For example, one industry near Tilaiya was not paying the minimum wages, so this was reported to the SDO who took the appropriate action. Thus the situation was rectified and there was no need for additional agitation.

However villagers were not always so enthusiastic about supporting activities which they did not see as relevant to their interests. Firstly they had to regard it as relevant to their situation. For instance, Lok Samiti took a stand against the central government's textile policy which placed an increased emphasis on the manufacturing sector and much less on the already minor role played by cottage industry. The NBJK workers were keen to mobilise the local lok samitis' support for the national Lok Samiti's position. However, there was little support for this position from the actual lok samitis which did not perceive the relevance of this stand to their immediate situation. The NBJK recognised that a greater awareness needed to be generated before popular pressure could be brought to bear.

It seemed clear from NBJK's experience that whilst the people might be aware of local issues they did not appear to have linked these to the macro-political structure. Yet JP had envisaged "total revolution" as including a political revolution, at the centre of which would be the lok samitis.

#### IV. SAREEK

##### 1. Elections and the Party Process

In West Bengal the general populace tended to be more aware of elections as political parties were more competitive and so played a more active role in mobilising people towards elections. For its part SAREEK tried to remain apolitical in accordance with its registration. Moreover whilst seeking to develop a political consciousness uniting the people across caste lines it down played the role of the political party. However, SAREEK did not try to restrict the involvement of the youths with political parties. In fact the political parties, in particular CPI(M) but also Congress (I) were attracted to the youths involved in the Udyog Parishads and the associated clubs in an attempt to develop their party organisation in these areas.<sup>20</sup>

The parties perceived the youths as motivated people concerned with mobilising the people towards the same sort of goals. Thus the parties actively recruited their membership. So in the Raidighi area, for example, most of the male club members belonged to the political parties.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the youths did not appear to comprehend any link between the political structure and the situation in the villages nor was it clear as to just what they expected of the political parties. Generally they were not familiar with the parties' manifestoes or programmes<sup>22</sup> and they did not believe that they had much influence on party decisions. Instead they found that they were expected to be bound by party decisions that did not allow much for the local situations. They perceived the

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<sup>20</sup> Interview between myself and Indrajit Samanta, SAREEK headquarters, Calcutta, 29.8.1985.

<sup>21</sup> Discussion between myself, SAREEK workers, instructors and local volunteers, 9.9.1985 at Raidighi.

<sup>22</sup> Indrajit Samanta, 29.8.1985.

parties as bureaucratic and hierarchical.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, they expressed their concern at their inability to control local representatives from acting purely for self-gain such as swapping political parties after the elections.<sup>24</sup>

JP had urged that those participating in the process of moral regeneration ought not to belong to any political party, otherwise their actions probably would not transcend partisan motivation.<sup>25</sup> However, the SAREEK youths tended to separate their party political work from the community development type work which they associated with the Udyog Parishad and SAREEK. This seemed very much in accordance with SAREEK's aim to develop a new political consciousness that was quite distinct from the power politics of the parties and involved an independence of thought. Indeed they sought to keep an open mind to party directives and concentrated on working with each other rather than opposing each other politically. For example, the CPI(M), at the block and district levels, was alleged to have urged that with respect to the registration of bargadar titles, preference be given to CPI(M) supporters at the expense of and even possible eviction of non-CPI(M) people, thus hoping to strengthen its position.<sup>26</sup> However those SAREEK youths who were also members of CPI(M) reasoned that a sharecropper was still a sharecropper no matter what his political affiliation. Their concern was to ensure justice for the sharecroppers.

Another situation where the CPI(M) members apparently came into conflict with the CPI(M) hierarchy was regarding the payment of minimum wages. In many cases the SAREEK people advocated a negotiated wage on the grounds of a fair wage for work done and the amount the farmer could afford to pay.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Meeting at Raidighi, 9.9.1985.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Supra, Chapter Three.

<sup>26</sup> Indrajit Samanta, 29.8.1985.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

In some cases this was less than in others and the point was that if the minimum wage was pushed then some farmers would not be able to afford to employ anyone and the land would be unproductive. It was an exercise in community cooperation and the local CPI(M) committees seemed to acquiesce; thus in effect the SAREEK workers were able to influence party policy at the local level, acting as watchdogs in the interest of their villages. The community spirit with which they approached their task seemed very much in line with JP's thinking. In fact JP advocated that in the absence of participatory democracy the political parties ought to assume responsibility for ensuring a fair distribution of land and a general prevalence of justice and equality on the rural scene.<sup>28</sup> JP's attitude towards political parties seemed to have been a question of balance and indeed this was what the SAREEK youths appeared to be trying to achieve.

## 2 . Awareness of and Participation in Government Programmes

Rather than focus on elections and parties SAREEK urged the youth groups to be vigilant and take action for themselves. They did this quite independently of SAREEK. For example, the Narayangarh Udyog Parishad undertook a government promoted gobar programme. Under this the government paid for the gobar units and the recipient households were responsible for labour, cement, blue metal, provision of a toilet and actual installation. The Udyog Parishad approached the Kharagpur IIT which had developed a very efficient gobar unit. Subsequently a workshop on the installation and maintenance of gobar units was organised. Thus it was that the government provided most of the funding, the IIT provided the expertise and SAREEK contributed nothing beyond its initial organisational work that had brought the Udyog Parishad into

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<sup>28</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "The Land Grabbers", (1965). Reprinted in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution, vol.3: India and Her Problems, ed Brahmanand (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1978), p.130.

being. However, SAREEK provided continual moral support and the director was asked to participate in the presentation of gobar training certificates.

The gobar units, which took animal and human excreta as well as all kinds of vegetable waste, could provide a valuable role in conserving forests, producing a good source of organic fertiliser and encouraging the use of a toilet, thus reducing the amount of open defecation and associated spreading of diseases and worms. The local cultural team put on a performance after the prize giving in order to demonstrate the benefits of biogas.

When the biogas programme first began only a few households took an interest, and mostly they were related to members of the Udyog Parishad. Others did not understand what it was about and were rather sceptical for despite the government subsidy it still involved a considerable financial commitment. To construct a toilet could cost from between 80 rupees and 140 rupees,<sup>29</sup> while the statutory minimum wage for an agricultural labourer in West Bengal was just under 15 rupees a day (1985). Also many people were suspicious about using toilets and about cooking with gas but through the example of the first few participants many others became involved. Nevertheless it was of little use to the very poor, who could not afford a toilet and were too preoccupied with wondering where their next meal was coming from.

This project clearly was an important community development constructive programme with implications in general education, health, environmental and quality of life issues, raising lokniti. In addition by taking advantage of such a government initiated programme, it would seem that organisations could use the

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<sup>29</sup> Interview between myself and Indrajit Samanta, Daharpur, Narayangargh, 20.2.1985.

state structure, rajniti, to expand lokniti. It just needed grass roots implementation if it was to be effective. The Udyog Parishad's involvement showed growing initiative and confidence. Other projects undertaken by many clubs mobilising government resources included the Integrated Rural Development Programme and social forestry.

### 3. Struggle

The SAREEK clubs were not strong in the area of struggle for they showed some reluctance by the clubs in following up their projects if they confronted government inertia or resistance. For example people in the Raidighi area simply took a fatalistic attitude when contractors, who were employed by the local government, did not sink the tube wells to a sufficient depth, pocketing the money instead. Clean drinking water was a national problem and was included as one of the priorities on Congress(I)'s twenty point programme. The situation on the Sundarban Islands, Raidighi area, was especially acute due to the low lying land and salinity of the region. The villagers complained about the situation to SAREEK but were reluctant to take their complaints to the contractor and the government. Their lack of education tended to undermine their confidence to assert themselves. Nevertheless, it was clear that the youth groups gradually were assuming some watchdog role as they were becoming actively interested and involved in the management of government resources.

## V. IMSE

### 1. Elections and the Party Process

With its Naxalite background, IMSE had been rather sceptical of political parties and elections. It did not support or encourage support for any political

party. This was a question for individuals. If IMSE did proffer advice then it was to suggest supporting candidates on merit rather than on the basis of any political party. Alternatively, it could support a boycott of the booths in order to demonstrate what it regarded as the farcical nature of elections. In assessing the eighth General Election (December 1984) the Santali monthly bulletin, published by IMSE, pointed out that no more than 60% of the voters went to the polling booths to cast their votes while the remaining 40% were indifferent.<sup>30</sup> Further, it doubted whether the common people consciously exercised their franchise, stating that 65% of the population were illiterate and ignorant, unconscious of their own rights.<sup>31</sup> Thus it concluded that the casting of votes was done out of inertia.<sup>32</sup> It criticised the government for not trying to build up awareness amongst the electorate about elections and government processes generally.<sup>33</sup> IMSE was more concerned with developing its alternative society than with supporting and improving the current system through the ballot box.

## 2 . Awareness of and Participation in Government Programmes

Nevertheless given that the modern idiom prevailed and that people had to contribute to it by way of taxes, IMSE also played an active role as a guardian of the people's resources invested in the current system of government, that is as a watchdog. In this role IMSE became involved with a number of government programmes. These included training programmes such as anganwadi workers under the ICDS; building smokeless chullas which were also associated with ICDS; khadi spinning and weaving and other trades. The

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<sup>30</sup> "Election and our People", IMSE NEWS BULLETIN, IV (December - January 1985): 1 -

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

government chose the students and teachers for these courses. Nevertheless IMSE sought to influence those involved. Assemblies with lectures based on IMSE ideology were held early in the morning and were followed by the IMSE song. Then in the evening trainees gathered for informal type meetings led by IMSE leaders to teach and encourage the singing of freedom songs. IMSE sought to introduce the trainees to as many new ideas as possible. For example, in February 1985 all the ICDS trainees attended a conference for rural newspapers, a conference that arose largely as a result of IMSE's attempts to develop greater cooperation in sharing news, promoting issues and training journalists by establishing a Rural Press Service. Thus these courses served to reach and conscientise other sections of the populace with a further view to their spreading the IMSE word, particularly through ICDS workers. The participants' reaction to this 'indoctrination'<sup>34</sup> was mixed. According to Rabi Dasgupta, the principal at Pannagram Training Centre, the IMSE college at Labpur, most of those involved in longer term courses developed a favourable response; however, there tended to be some resistance with the short courses (that is one to two weeks) to this 'brainwashing'.<sup>35</sup>

The extent to which 'brainwashing' replaced rather than supplemented IMSE's efforts at dialogue was not clear. The government-sponsored training programmes differed from the adult education classes. With adult education the main aim was to liberate the oppressed. However, the main aim of the government-sponsored training programmes was to train people according to the government's volition, for example in a trade or in health care. There was a specific time period in which to undertake the programme, varying from a few days to a few months and there was some set syllabus. The type of dialogue envisaged by Freire does not fit in with this situation.

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<sup>34</sup> Interview with Rabi Dasgupta, Labpur campus, 29.1.1985.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.



IMSE realised the limitations of these programmes but rationalised that these programmes were going to be undertaken any way. Furthermore, they provided IMSE with entry points into communities that it might not otherwise have had. IMSE was able to demonstrate its concern with basic issues that affected day to day living by its association with government programmes such as health and job training skills. Thus it developed a relationship with the people involved, strengthening its position with regard to their communities. So IMSE's influence spread. Also IMSE believed that it could use these programmes to undermine the prevailing power structures. On the one hand this was done directly by teaching the participants the job skills for which the courses were designed; these new skills enabled the participants to gain independence and confidence that would help them stand up for their rights and against oppression. On the other hand IMSE directly challenged participants' consciousness by exposing them to as many new ideas as possible, including the IMSE way. For example, the smokeless chulla programmes also provided scope for this type of consciousness building. Smokeless chullas were a special design of mud stoves. They were built with chimneys that diverted the smoke outside. The training course provided IMSE with an opportunity to expand the curriculum to include environmental issues and the need for domestic consumers to conserve energy, as well as explain how it was actually the large commercial enterprises that were the main exploiters. Thus IMSE sought to educate and influence its students.

IMSE constantly emphasised that the basic concern was poverty. This was brought out by the anganwadi workers who not only taught mothers about nutrition but about the causes of malnutrition as they demanded to know from the mothers: "why don't you feed the child sufficient food?" "Why can't you

afford proper food?" "Why are you poor?".<sup>36</sup> Thus the aim was not simply to treat the symptoms but to use the health programmes as a means to conscientise the people. It was argued that to treat people with conventional medicines only, such as antibiotics and vitamins, would help perpetuate their plight. The point was that the diseases from which they suffered were often diseases of poverty and unless they overcame their impoverished situation they would not overcome the diseases. This approach had some parallels with Gandhi's views on medicine for he warned that by treating people's symptoms the doctor promoted a continuation of the lifestyle that caused those symptoms.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to the government-sponsored training and health schemes, IMSE became involved with the central government's nodal agency scheme.<sup>38</sup> This could have enabled it to wield a great deal of influence in determining which other non-government agencies should receive government funding, if the scheme could have worked effectively. In so far as the direction of these resources assisted people to become independent and confident so that they would stand up for their rights and assume greater power within the state structure, it gradually decentralised it. However, the responsibility would have placed IMSE in danger of compromising itself vis a vis the government for it had to conform to certain government requirements if it was to continue in this role. Consequently, it may not have been able to put the resources to what it regarded as people's maximum benefit within government guidelines. The fact remained that if IMSE did not assume this responsibility the task might have gone to another organisation that would have been less effective than IMSE in ensuring the expansion of people's power.

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<sup>36</sup> Interview with Rabi Dasgupta and Biblap Halim, Labpur campus, 29.1.1985.

<sup>37</sup> Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, 1909, reprinted in Gandhi, The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, vol.X, (Ahmedabad: The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Government of India, 1963), p.35.

<sup>38</sup> *Supra*, Chapter Six.

### 3. Struggle

Besides its direct cooperation type involvement in government schemes, IMSE operated at another level to raise lokniti, that is the grass roots level. It encouraged people to take up issues and struggle in order to ensure their just treatment by government authorities. IMSE mobilised people both for general and specific causes.

One general and far-reaching attempt at mobilisation was the organisation of a 300 kilometer Great March from Bolpur to Calcutta in 1983. Both IMSE members and other villagers were invited to join in. The simple step of participation forced those involved to be confronted with the issues that were raised such as minimum wages, dowry, afforestation and price rises. It also engendered an atmosphere of struggle. During the evenings, workshops and seminars were held and at the end of the march a huge rally with speakers was organised. By popularising these issues and involving general participation IMSE not only stirred people's consciousness and boosted their confidence, it drew the government's attention to their concerns. Many similar smaller scale marches were organised at the district level. They were well planned beforehand in order to: maximise their effectiveness as training programmes for the participants; direct the issues to the attention of relevant government authorities; and publicise IMSE's role in seeking to overcome the difficulties. In addition the participants were brought together, and through group participation they became more confident about standing up to the authorities for their rights and about finding solutions to the problems themselves. Thus the marches demonstrated also the importance of organisation for the purpose of overcoming their situation.

Two specific causes for struggle with which IMSE was involved included the failure of the Block Office to provide loans for the purchase of handlooms promised by the government, and wage struggles. The handloom incident involved 60 women who wanted to form a cooperative. In 1982 these women, from Labpur block, underwent government sponsored training in handloom at the Pannagram Training Centre with the expectation of government support in establishing a cooperative. However, the applications were shelved by the panchayat office and despite numerous deputations they received no satisfaction.<sup>39</sup> Basically the problem was one of apathy on the part of the administration. Despite their frustrations these largely illiterate women maintained their commitment and a united front. Finally on 30 March, 1985 ten women started a fast until death outside their Block Office. The fast lasted for 57 hours and ended when government officials agreed to organise a meeting with the women in order to discuss their demands. The meeting was arranged for 19 April, 1985, when the problems were sorted out and after which loans started being made available to the women. The women involved were not actually members of IMSE but they received their initial training from IMSE and the organisation provided them with moral support and guidance over the years of their struggle.

One wage struggle with which IMSE was involved occurred in July 1985 when IMSE organised strikes amongst agricultural labourers in support of a claim for the payment of minimum wages both in Bihar and West Bengal, that is eight rupees and ten paise in Bihar and almost 15 rupees in West Bengal. A number of agitations were arranged in support of the strikes. The strikers met with considerable resistance from the landlords who launched attacks, apparently

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<sup>39</sup>"Training of the Distressed Women for Self-Employment ends in Smoke", IMSE NEWS BULLETIN, IV (February 1985): 3 - 4.

with police support, against the strikers. Many IMSE members were arrested. However they persisted in their demands. Eventually payment of the minimum wage was achieved in Bihar while in West Bengal a compromise was reached with the payment of ten rupees plus some paddy.

As Nodal agency in West Bengal IMSE would have had to be careful as to how it involved itself in such struggles. According to IMSE's ideology it was more concerned with developing an alternative society than with watching the right ordering of the current one. Yet IMSE was very much involved with this latter approach. In so far as the state existed and held the forces of power to which people must contribute IMSE was concerned to make the state work for its cause as far as possible by mobilising government resources, and demanding good government policies and their effective implementation.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Linking the organisation to the macro-political structure would seem to increase people's participation in government, making it more effective in its response to people's needs. Although it is not clear that the organisations were able to directly affect government policies they were able to ensure the effective implementation of some government policies that were intended for their benefit, with improvements in health and material well-being. This led to an increase in confidence amongst people involved. Further the programmes provided scope for general awareness about many issues: social, environmental and political; this was very important if a comprehensive approach towards "total revolution" was to be taken. In so far as confidence and awareness were raised government forces were decentralised to the extent that they were more responsive to people's needs, thus helping democracy to work more effectively and honestly. It was a move towards good government.

JP also hoped that good government would facilitate self-government as it would generate an environment that would favour the growth of lokniti from below, gradually erasing the need for the state structure. However, JP did not anticipate that lokniti would develop spontaneously in order to promote good government. He believed it required a deliberate and conscious effort to mobilise the grass roots forces to that end, thus entailing a balanced approach: diminishing rajniti by actively working for good government, and expanding lokniti by organising for self-government. JP seemed to envisage them as two parallel and complementary forces, but they also appear contradictory. To raze rajniti by working for good government would surely strengthen that system by making it more representative, thus reducing the need for any alternative structure. JP seemed to appreciate this point too, and explained that it would take a long time before his ideal of Janata Sarkar was achieved, if ever. What seems to have been important in JP's approach was his belief in the role of the individual while taking cognisance of prevailing state structures, and he constantly strove to reconcile the two in a voluntarist type of approach.

## CHAPTER NINE

### OVERVIEW OF VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS IN RELATION TO ACHIEVEMENT OF JP'S GOALS

The influence of JP's ideas could be found in the work of the four organisations that have been studied, although no definitive conclusions can be drawn as to their providing a blueprint for social change. This chapter will sum up the parallels in their ideas with those of JP and it will draw out the issues that arose as a result of attempts to implement them, but firstly it will look again at the broader context affecting the working of JP's ideas within the various organisations. These concern the Bihar and West Bengal socio-cultural contexts.

#### I. BIHAR AND WEST BENGAL SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT

Some differences could be noted in the operations of IMSE and SAREEK on the one hand, and the CYSV and Lok Samiti on the other. First was the use of education by both IMSE and SAREEK starting with matters which were of interest and relevance to the villagers' lives using the local environment, language and culture as primary media of education. At the same time they seemed to be aware that education was a two-way process and they were concerned to draw on all participants to contribute to the educational process. The role of education was treated very much as one of awareness raising and was pursued not only through education classes and cultural performances but day to day issues such as health.

West Bengal has a strong tradition of education which was demonstrated by the widespread use of vernacular newspapers last century. This was also another characteristic of IMSE's and SAREEK's approaches and could be seen in IMSE's association with the Rural Press Agency, and SAREEK's use of a newspaper in order to widen communications with the local groups. There seemed to be a widespread interest in popular education throughout Bengal. This came out in SAREEK's ability to link up with the youth groups by promoting their active involvement in education projects. The Bengali philosophers, Rammohun Roy and Rabindranath Tagore, played an important role in promoting popular education, and Tagore particularly strove hard to gain maximum benefit for the whole community. Tagore's legacy was apparent in the work of both IMSE and SAREEK. IMSE sought to add to it by studying the work of Paulo Freire, who specifically worked with exploited people. Education proved to be a very useful tool for both IMSE and SAREEK and it was not used to the same extent by CYSV and Lok Samiti as an integral part of their overall approach, although, for example, the NBJK workers recognised the value of cultural tools as a means of education.

The two Bihar organisations, especially Lok Samiti, stressed the total involvement of the whole village with all sectors being adequately represented. Lok Samiti's approach would seem to be very Gandhian. Further its main office was on the same site as the headquarters of the Sarva Seva Sangh in Varanasi. This was not to say that IMSE and SAREEK did not share this ideal or were any less successful at achieving it but they did not give it the same immediate emphasis. IMSE on the one hand stressed democratic centralism and SAREEK's approach was to gradually try and expand a relatively elite group



firstly with regard to their consciousness and secondly with regard to their participation. IMSE's approach clearly showed its Maoist influence as it stressed the organisation rather than the individual. Whereas JP saw organisation as a means to strengthen the individual, IMSE seemed to use the individual as a means to strengthen the organisation. IMSE had a strong Maoist background that showed in its overtly political outlook such as its Long March campaigns, its criticism of the electoral process, and its antagonism towards the various political parties. It was perhaps JP's own Marxist background that encouraged him to depart from Vinoba's ostensibly Gandhian position of gentle persuasion to actively challenging the prevailing political order. Certainly JP acknowledged the importance of the Naxalite's position in challenging his thinking.

## II. COMMON THEMES BETWEEN JP'S IDEAS AND THE VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

JP's ideas were drawn out earlier. He had many interests but his ultimate goal was "total revolution" or partyless democracy focusing on the worth of every individual and on the mutual responsibility of everyone to each other. It is on this goal that attention has focused in this thesis seeking to determine whether JP's ideas on this matter were relevant to voluntary organisations also seeking a similar objective. The four organisations studied seemed to be in sympathy with his ideal. The CYSV and Lok Samiti which were launched by JP specifically hoped to achieve a "total revolution" in every sphere and aspect of society. IMSE with its Marxist background differed in many respects from JP's general ideas but its communist vision of a stateless society was very similar to the ultimate goal. Likewise IMSE's recognition of the need to act mainly outside the prevailing parliamentary state institutions paralleled JP's

focus on extra parliamentary work. SAREEK which also had only indirect links with JP stressed extra constitutional work too but it did not actually profess to any ultimate vision. Nevertheless it worked very much in the voluntarist idiom seeking to effect immediate albeit gradual changes towards expanding lok niti. In practice this was how JP and the other organisations worked. They gave priority to raising consciousness, increasing popular participation, developing a popular solidarity as well as keeping watch over the prevailing government structure in order to ensure its most effective working.

JP emphasised a number of steps that he saw as necessary to achieve this end. These included the need for trained motivators, an adequate organisational structure, coalition building or networking, a balanced constructive programme, proper funding and vigilance over the government. The following sections will briefly sum up how the four respective organisations tackled these steps. Although their approaches demonstrate their different socio-cultural backgrounds, the significance of the sort of ideas JP had to their work is also apparent. Nevertheless this does not provide a clear cut path towards "total revolution".

## 1. Trained Motivators

Promoting the use of trained motivators by both JP and the organisations presented a potential dilemma in seeking to establish autonomous local organisations for the outside organisers created a possible sense of dependency by the local groups. All the organisations were very aware of this. For his part, JP had hopes for the type of approach that the CYSV adopted. It was an organisation of trained motivators and provided its members with training and organisational support. Its members were young people for they tend not to be burdened with family and other responsibilities. They concentrated their work

in areas that they considered to manifest gross injustices. Their work required their active involvement in the local communities. Furthermore, the young motivators were required to be dependent on the grass roots for their well-being. This had important implications in that on the one hand, there was a reciprocal type of dependence being developed, and on the other, the turnover of motivators provided a continuous stream of new influences and also reduced dependence on any individual.

Although JP had high hopes for the students he recognised the transient nature of their involvement. Thus he acknowledged that they could not be relied upon to keep up the momentum necessary for any revolutionary change in the country.<sup>1</sup> The CYSV experience would seem to support this argument for although it would appear to have been an educative experience for its members, the actual extent of the work was limited by the numbers involved. Consequently JP did not expect the students to have a monopoly on this type of field work.

In contrast SAREEK had two levels of motivators: those who were based with the headquarters group; and those who emerged from the local youth within the Udyog Parishad structures. SAREEK's aim was to tap into existing local groups using local workers. Thus SAREEK hoped to ensure the workers permanency and maximise local responsibility as well as ensure workers' sensitivity to local concerns and commitment to the area. Meanwhile the headquarters group stayed quite apart from the local movements. However, SAREEK also employed a number of local field workers whose position was somewhat ambivalent in their relationship between the two structures. Also

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<sup>1</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, "Total Revolution: Some Clarifications." Interview with Brahmanand, Patna, December 1977. Published in Jayaprakash Narayan, Towards Total Revolution vol.4: Total Revolution ed. Brahmanand (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1978), p.199.

there still remained the problem of devolving power from the local leadership through the community. Nevertheless, the new leadership structures that SAREEK encouraged bore a number of parallels to JP's ideas. JP had wanted to mobilise youths to provide leadership in the development of a new village committee structure. SAREEK was seeking to do the same, although it envisaged the new village committees as developing from an expansion of the youth structures whereas JP saw the two working hand in hand.

For its part NBJK recruited a number of skilled motivators to promote a separate organisation, Lok Samiti. Usually they had prior organisational experience and had wider links with other groups. Such contacts were encouraged by NBJK. In order that the local lok samitis not be dependent on NBJK's continued presence the field workers had an independent identity from the lok samiti structures that were established. They worked at the local level but were not local people and remained separate from the local organisational structure. Yet in so far as they motivated, initiated and supported the organisation of the lok samitis they were the mainstays of that organisation. Moreover, they received a small stipend from NBJK and were not dependent on their local communities for food and shelter. However, the type of work that they undertook was probably much the same as envisaged for the Vahini youth.

IMSE's approach was different because its emphasis was on its own organisation and the commitment of the local groups to it, but it also recognised the value of individual contributions which were likely to be inhibited by any sense of dependence involved in the relationships within the organisation. IMSE's motivators came from within its own ranks although the founders remained its principal leaders. This meant that the motivators were committed to IMSE's cause. The emerging leadership were generally based in their local areas. Occasionally though if IMSE sought to develop new areas bringing them

within IMSE it moved workers into those areas, but it tried to do this with caution and sensitivity for the local environment..

## 2. Organisational Structure

JP's concept of a far reaching representative organisational structure with autonomous local groups suggested contradictions in how to achieve this sort of inverted pyramid in a society that was structured, both politically and socially, the other way around.

These problems were demonstrated by NBJK's work with Lok Samiti. The Lok Samiti aimed to operate on JP's inverted pyramid structure by giving support to and practical experience in self-government. It was based on a confederation of autonomous lok samitis based in different villages and adapted according to local conditions. In NBJK's experience it was a very loose organisation that served mainly as a means of disseminating information to the lok samiti regarding government policies and the availability of government programmes. Not all of this was understood by the lok samitis which were not really autonomous bodies at that stage and did not appear to have strong links with other levels of Lok Samiti. Moreover local participation by Harijans and women was low. Both groups were being encouraged to increase their involvement: Harijans were forming separate organisations, and women participated in lok samiti programmes. Again the situation presented the problem of having to accept a lesser participation at that time in order to generate momentum for fuller participation.

JP had hoped that the CYSV might provide a means to overcome this. The CYSV was two-pronged in its organisational structure. On the one hand it was an organisation designed to give youths direction, and on the other to provide a revolutionary vanguard. Thus it aimed to raise consciousness both within and

outside its organisations, but the CYSV mainly attracted educated middle class youths and as such it did not develop into the mass organisation that JP hoped. However, in so far as the CYSV pursued grass roots organisational work it achieved a fairly high degree of representativeness. Its organisational structure was specifically designed to encourage members' participation within the larger community. Members were required to be non-communal and had to be prepared to live with the people with whom they worked. This approach must have had some influence on the local communities. It must be noted though that, CYSV specifically chose to work with relatively homogeneous communities so that organisation could be facilitated in its efforts to develop a model for struggle

SAREEK started with a narrow base, that of interested, relatively aware youth groups, and it did not try to establish representative village committees although it encouraged the youth groups to move in this direction. Gradually the youth groups began to expand their membership, structure and content, thus raising the consciousness of the club participants and the wider community. Initially there had been some resistance to the devolution of power but participation appeared to be widening. In many instances the participation of women took the form of separate mahila mandals. SAREEK's organisational structure was very locally based and its aim was to strengthen the grass roots rather than devise an alternative structure of government. Therefore it was not faced with the same inverted pyramid contradiction.

IMSE, which had a very strong organisational structure, minimised the pyramid contradiction in so far as it was based on democratic centralism so that whilst the broad masses had scope to communicate with the top echelons, they

remained at the base. It emphasised the individual's role in strengthening the organisation which could draw on everyone's knowledge, experience and support. As such it was a centralised albeit democratic organisation that emphasised the importance of establishing and maintaining two-way channels of communication thus serving as an educative process for both the organisational hierarchy and the grass roots. It targeted its membership at poor peasants and labourers and sought to cut across social barriers. However, the participation of women was poor. So IMSE also presented a contradiction in so far as its organisation faced a lack of representativeness of the more depressed sectors within the organisation. IMSE recognised this situation and continually sought to educate its current members while encouraging those not yet involved. It believed that people would only be reached by taking cognisance of the prevailing social structures and it did not expect to suddenly move beyond this. Rather it was a process of education and organisation.

### 3. Coalition Building or Networking

Forming a coalition can be a strengthening process but it may mean compromising ideals or promoting other organisations. This contradiction was recognised by Mao who still thought that it was useful to cultivate class allies in an effort to strengthen one's own position. JP's movement was faced with many contradictions when it joined forces with other groups for the dismissal of Mrs Gandhi's government. The others, notably the political parties and their supporters did not share JP's long term goals. Realising this, JP sought to maintain a distinction between short and long term goals although they were not always clear to everyone else. JP also hoped that coalitions need not be competitive, rather they might be complementary. This was the sort of

relationship that he envisaged for CYSV and Lok Samiti. The Lok Samiti guidelines made provision for the active involvement of CYSV, but CYSV did not seem to have been interested. As such it did not work as actively with the Lok Samiti as JP had hoped. Instead CYSV concentrated on specific struggles rather than developing a mass movement.

Nevertheless individual Vahini members had links with other organisations and the Vahini promoted a farmers' and labourers' movement aimed to unite its members and strengthen their position in times of struggle.

Meanwhile NBJK hoped to introduce the lok samitis to other influences. However, the lok samitis appeared to be weak in this regard although they seemed to be making strong links with each other especially for the purpose of achieving certain goals such as the removal of the brothel and of local government corruption.

For its own part, NBJK had strong affiliations with other organisations and so did its field workers. NBJK actively pursued complementary coalition building tactics on a broad scale. For example, its association with AVARD, which was also strongly associated with JP, involved sharing resources, expertise and information in the interests of rural development. It was a form of networking. Such associations may have involved NBJK in assisting organisations that they perceived as more conservative but it would have been a reciprocal relationship. The benefits derived from membership of AVARD were useful to the general well-being of all its members. This is really the essence of coalition. Different, perhaps competing, organisations, which are not able to achieve their purposes by themselves, join forces to pool resources and gain access to expertise so as to strengthen their position.



Similarly IMSE was also a member of AVARD. The IMSE hierarchy promoted affiliations with other groups in order to widen its own influence as well as draw on their expertise. For example, it was a founding member of the Rural Press Agency. It also associated itself with a number of government sponsored training programmes as well as the Nodal agency scheme. All these connections brought it into contact with a variety of groups. Moreover the fact that the government involved IMSE demonstrated a recognition by the government of IMSE's strength at developing widespread associations. Further, the value of forming coalitions manifested itself at the local level in the form of interest groups formed to struggle for specific demands such as the khadi spinners who wanted a loan, and the labourers who wanted minimum wages.

Local level coalitions were also found amongst the SAREEK groups. For example, the bhindi cultivators formed their own interest group. Also, the Narayangah Udyog Parishad and the Kharagpur IIT successfully combined to implement the government's subsidised gobar biogas scheme. Moreover the Narayangah Udyog Parishad was selected by the government for participation in the IRDP. SAREEK headquarters encouraged these developments, and kept itself abreast of other groups working in development areas and it also involved individual youth group members in training experiences. It sought to promote general interest at the local level in the work of other organisations through its newspaper and discussions.

#### 4. Constructive Programme

Constructive work covers a broad range of ideas from meeting basic needs to raising consciousness. It would seem to be important to establish a balance so that the different types of work may complement each other rather than be undertaken at the expense of each other, otherwise work pursued is likely to be undermined also. This was seen with Vinoba's prapti work which really needed to be reinforced by pushti and nirman work. Diverting one's attention from what may be perceived as the major goal to a subsidiary one may seem to be contradictory; for example, putting efforts into food production during a struggle situation. Yet as Mao recognised, the struggle front could collapse for lack of adequate food. JP's emphasis varied throughout his life but he always stressed the need not to upset food production. Moreover his description of the people's committees seemed to assume the ongoing nature of constructive work.

This approach did not appear to have been heeded by the CYSV. CYSV was concerned to raise people's consciousness by actively involving them in intensive struggle campaigns against prevailing injustices, in particular the implementation of government land ceiling laws in Bodh Gaya. Other forms of constructive work that it undertook such as cooperative farming, breaking down social barriers and working against alcoholism tended to be undertaken only in so far as they were necessary to the overall struggle programme rather than because of any intrinsic value that they represented in moving towards a 'total revolution'. JP had not envisaged the CYSV as the whole of the 'total revolution' although it would seem that he had hoped it would be more integrated with the total.

The other organisations seemed to be mindful of a more comprehensive approach with an emphasis on local identity and resourcefulness in order to encourage local responsibility. NBJK was actively involved in a number of constructive programmes independently of its work with Lok Samiti such as its experimental farm, homeopathic clinic and relief work which served a two-fold purpose aimed to promote awareness and contribute towards meeting basic needs. In addition the promotion of Lok Samiti was also a very significant form of constructive work. The lok samitis themselves undertook a variety of practical initiatives in relation to matters such as safe-drinking water, local corruption, establishing a gram kosh and developing the concept of lok adlat.

IMSE's constructive work centred around its education centres from which it was able to expand its organisation, develop people's consciousness and initiate programmes that were important to the general well-being of its members such as grain banks. Its other main approach was its involvement with government training schemes and health projects which enabled it to provide important services as well as conscientising its participants.

SAREEK's work also focused on its education centres serving as a means to raise awareness and to start other programmes including health projects, science clubs, biogas, cooperatives as well as cultural teams who extended the educational role of the youth groups.

## 5. Funding

JP had urged that organisational work be largely independent of outside funding in order that local organisations would be self-reliant. Outside funding presented the obvious contradiction of reducing village level autonomy and possibly the viability of the whole organisation in the absence of that funding.

The CYSV did not lend financial support to any projects that it promoted at the local level and it expected its cadres to be self-reliant. However, it incurred some expense in general organisational work and the promotion of campaigns. It relied on outside funding from approved individual donations. Its approach had important implications in its educational value about the onus and responsibility for social change.

NBJK was self-sufficient to the extent that it could support its members but it required some outside funding including monies from overseas sources for some of its constructive work for example the payment of its field workers involved in lok samiti. However, this money was not directly channelled to the lok samitis which were responsible for raising their own revenues such as through gram kosh, grain banks, subscriptions, as well as tapping into government projects.

Similarly IMSE and SAREEK encouraged local self-sufficiency. However, they also accepted foreign and local donations. In addition they received government funding, although they tended to receive it on different terms. The SAREEK youth groups applied for government funding independently of SAREEK. This was also done by the IMSE committees but the IMSE central organisation sought funding too.

Funding compromised self-reliance and had the danger of binding groups to a perverse pattern of linkages. Yet in the absence of adequate financial resources it would have been difficult for NBJK, IMSE and SAREEK to undertake any substantial projects that were important in promoting their organisational work. They all stressed the need for self-reliance and emphasised the use of local resources in an effort to counter the shortcomings of the situation.

## 6. Demands on Government

The placing of demands on government so as to ensure good government while working for self-government is fraught with contradictions; one tries to improve it on the one hand, yet seeks to erode it on the other, and the political idioms become interwoven. The relationship between JP and the state was not always clear. He urged the government and its bureaucracy to be more accountable and he encouraged people's vigilance to ensure that this would occur. On the other hand, he also urged people to do without any wing of the government if it was not necessary to their condition.

The activities undertaken by the CYSV basically involved demands on the government for good government such as the implementation of land ceiling laws in Bodh Gaya, and it actively campaigned against candidates and parties that it thought would be detrimental to the cause of good government.

The Lok Samiti structure actively promoted good government encouraging vigilance on the part of the lok samitis to check local government corruption, as well as the effective implementation of programmes that directly affected them such as safe water and IRDP. However, the NBJK associated lok samitis had not yet been associated with the selection of people's candidates at election time and they were not interested to vote for NBJK's preferred candidate in spite of NBJK's encouragement.

Whilst IMSE sought to remain aloof from political parties and the electoral process generally, it did see an important role for itself in ensuring good

government. For example, IMSE's association with various government programmes placed it in a stronger position to ensure a more effective implementation of these programmes. It also supported local action against government inaction or corruption. In addition, it organised campaigns such as the Long March which specifically enunciated its grievances to the government and registered a number of demands.

A number of SAREEK members had some association with various political parties but generally there was no actual involvement in electoral activities and there was some concern at the lack of accountability by local representatives. However, those members who were associated with political parties seemed to be able to affect party policy at the local level in what they regarded as the community's best interests. The SAREEK groups were also becoming increasingly aware and were taking advantage of government-sponsored projects although there also appeared to be a reluctance to complain to the government if it did not fulfill its promises.

JP particularly wished to reduce the role of political parties which restricted the role of the electorate to the vote and even with that they had no effective choice over candidates nor control over policy and representatives. Thus JP promoted the concept of people's candidates which he thought would give the electorate a real choice and make the execution of their vote relevant. JP hoped that as people's candidates gained increasing popularity over party candidates the role of parties would decline to such an extent that they would no longer put forward candidates. Only people's candidates would stand - one in each electorate, making the vote a mere formality. Perhaps the next step would be to do away with the vote, for elected representatives would really be controlled through the delegates' council. Although JP did not appear to have actually suggested this, it would seem to be the logical extension of JP's ideas. The

vote demonstrates on the one hand how it could be made into a useful tool with the election of people's candidates, and at the same time gradually rendered irrelevant.

JP advocated a partyless democracy and he demanded that party politics be kept out of the Lok Samiti and the CYSV although he was prepared for ordinary party members to be ordinary members of Lok Samiti. This may seem contradictory but perhaps JP regarded this as a way to show those ordinary party members that there was an alternative to party politics while making it clear that it was quite separate from party politics. The approach of the SAREEK groups seemed to parallel Lok Samiti in that whilst political affiliations were not banned, there was a consciousness that these were not appropriate to their work. For his part, JP's withdrawal from the CSP was gradual in that he retained his ordinary membership for a period even after joining the bhoodan movement. Given JP's background, one can understand his sympathy with ordinary party members who were interested to explore an alternative political way.

However, JP's attitude towards the party system would seem to be more complex when one tries to evaluate his role in ousting Mrs Gandhi. JP openly supported the defeat of Mrs Gandhi's Congress and the victory of the Janata. NBJK's role in the 1984 election presented similar albeit smaller scale problems. He seemed to move from advocating self-government to a call for good government. Yet JP's point was that to achieve self-government there needed to be good government ensuring an environment in which basic freedoms could be enjoyed. It was only in this sort of atmosphere that steps could be taken towards self-government. Thus the groups had to develop a political strategy of interaction with government structures so as to represent the interests of the people with whom they are involved. This largely took the form

of publicising of, and involvement in, government schemes that were of immediate benefit to group members and supporters, as well as demonstrations against government inaction and corruption. The groups were independent from political parties, but in so far as they developed a political strategy and interacted with political parties and individual politicians they established themselves as interest groups seeking good government. Yet at the same time they aimed to reduce the need for political parties by gradually developing people's organisations and linking with others. The basis of JP's ideas (and apparently that of the organisations) was to educate and organise people separately from the parliamentary party structure so that they not become mere mouthpieces of the parties, and consequently they might assume greater responsibility for their own lives.

This was quite different from Vinoba's approach which seemed to be to try and avoid contradictions with the government, parties and large land-owners and thus keep voluntarist politics at the margin. Nevertheless Vinoba's approach did not reduce the contradictions of working towards self-government within the modern idiom.

### III. CONCLUSION

This chapter has not attempted to evaluate the work of JP or the organisations but has sought to show the convergence of their ideas, including the difficulties that they have presented in implementation. The difficulties that have been drawn out emphasise the ongoing nature of their work. JP continually analysed his work and was prepared to alter his direction or emphasis. He may have been encouraged to do this because of his Marxist beginnings, in particular his admiration for M N Roy, but this approach was also consistent with Gandhi's



idea of one step at a time. In essence it was the style that the voluntary organisations adopted. It seems that this step by step approach is a very important strategy in working towards lokniti over rajniti for there are many contradictions that are not easily reconciled. What is more important is to recognise and come to terms with them. There are many variables involved at many different levels as the work of the voluntary organisations showed. It is not an exact science that can produce a doctrinaire solution. It is a continuing process.

## CONCLUSION

The main aims of this thesis have been to examine the ideas of Jayaprakash Narayan and show their relevance to India by the way in which they have manifested themselves in a number of voluntary organisations. In addition it has aimed to show that in so far as these organisations followed ideas similar to those of JP they effectively explored the possibilities for the foundation of an alternative polity based on voluntarism, emphasising the role of the individual.

JP's broad philosophy was that of "total revolution" involving political, economic, social, educational, cultural and ideological changes. He believed in a participatory democracy, that is, a society based on social and economic justice where everyone participated in a meaningful way for the ordering of the society. Politically, this entailed active and equal participation by individuals. This was entailed in his "saintly" or voluntarist concept of lokniti which JP believed required a decentralised government structure through which local communities would be responsible for local affairs without interference from power brokers such as political parties. It also required an atmosphere based on mutual concern and respect, not personal power. Moral responsibility of the individual was seen as central. Given India's modern political idiom with its centralised constitutional structure, characterised by rajniti which involved increasing centralisation of power by political parties, moves towards lokniti would require a change in political idioms, that would involve a change in thinking and mode of behaviour by all individuals.

Support for JP's ideas could be found in Gandhi's satyagraha philosophy which stressed self-government through voluntary cooperation and decentralisation. Also there were a number of parallels with Rabindranath

Tagore's emphasis on the individual, and with M N Roy who like JP made a deliberate shift from emphasising a centralised party structure to the role of the individual. In contrast there were also a number of similarities with Mao too. Mao emphasised the role of the party but always stressed the importance of the masses in the party processes. Mao's position was particularly pertinent because JP's experience showed that it was not realistic to achieve a complete polarisation between direct and representative democracy and consequently JP's path required him to constantly commute between the voluntarist idiom with his ideal of a new sarvodaya politics or lokniti and the prevailing constitutional politics, of the modern idiom.

Thus JP adopted a very total approach, that is, one that integrated politics in an all embracing strategy that dealt with all aspects of the day-to-day reality that people confronted. This included an appreciation of the prevailing political, social and economic structure, and the possible opposition and even suppression from the dominant forces that could be encountered. He believed this required educating and organising people into decentralised organs based on popular participation that would empower people to sustain struggle enabling them to resist and subsequently undermine these dominant forces for he did not believe this would occur spontaneously. Also he was concerned with the tensions that would emerge from developing lokniti in the face of rajniti, that is shifting responsibility from the state to the masses, and the difficulties in achieving this. He wanted to achieve a realistic balance in the light of prevailing circumstances.

The relevance of JP's ideas was brought out by the voluntary organisations' work at the grass roots level as representing an immediate form of action towards voluntary cooperation and the decentralisation of political and

economic structures. These voluntary organisations were particularly concerned with the suppressed and oppressed sectors of society, and the totality of their lives - political, social, economic and cultural. This involved issues such as basic necessities including clean water and other health issues, also reducing caste tensions and promoting the equality of women. Their direction seemed to be based on people's day-to-day experiences, and the fundamental belief was that men must solve their own problems, taking control over their own lives. Consequently, their main aim was to educate and organise people to this end, that is, towards their own empowerment. The organisations sought to work with people, particularly the poor and oppressed, rather than work for them. As they did so, they sought to raise immediate issues such as exploitation and oppression, trying to develop a consciousness about the structures that were exploiting and oppressing. Thus they wanted to develop a desire for freedom among an otherwise largely apathetic mass.

Information, skills and knowledge were imparted through education classes, health programmes, cultural teams, production activities such as cooperatives, and the conscious process to evolve a local participatory structure that could take responsibility for the initiative and implementation of these activities. In this way authoritarian structures, particularly local ones, were dealt a blow as areas of freedom were opened up and defended, through grain banks and other cooperatives which reduced the control of the moneylender, and increased the financial power of participants. This demonstrated increasing local responsibility for local situations. Also lok adlat represented a means whereby local disputes could be determined locally. JP believed that this sort of immediate action would help raise people's consciousness and undermine those institutions that did not support their free actions.

These voluntary organisations operated outside the mainstream modern political idiom and the political parties apparently had no control over them. However, they were not completely detached from the institutionalised political structure. In so far as they interacted, this tended to be as a means of a larger total transformation. The type of interaction with which they were involved included compelling the government to implement its schemes intended to benefit the poor such as loans, clean water, land distribution and minimum wages. They were doing this by ensuring people's participation in the implementation of these schemes. This involvement at the local level had many implications, such as improvements in health, economic position as well as enhancing social status and generating local cooperation and community spirit. At the macro level the organisations presented themselves as a possible non-party political force promoting social actions that may have had an impact on the orientation of political parties and government, improving government by opening up channels of communication to ensure more relevant policies and more effective implementation, demanding accountability from government representatives and the bureaucracy. So whilst the organisations apparently operated outside the modern idiom, their role would seem to be one of a pressure group on the modern polity, suggesting that they would gradually be absorbed in to the same structure. This approach may have made for good government, but it did not suggest any alternative form of polity based on self-government.

The good government/self-government issue represents the essential tension between modern and voluntarist politics. Good government was what Nehru wanted, based on a centralised form of representative democracy. Self-government involves moving away from any centralised form to the lokniiti or sarvodaya position that Gandhi represented based on the role of each individual being responsible for ordering society through voluntary cooperation and self-

imposed restraints. Gandhi recognised that this could be achieved only gradually as people were prepared to accept this responsibility and government devolved it. This was JP's understanding too. It followed that concrete steps towards self-government could best be achieved under a system of good government that allowed for freedoms of expression and association as well as limited popular contributions to government. An authoritarian government would prevent these things, oppressing and stultifying any growth in this direction. JP believed that good government could best provide an environment in which self-government could be nurtured, and that therefore it was essential to resist moves away from "good" representative democracy to an authoritarian regime even if this meant struggling at that level of politics.

There are many tensions in seeking to achieve the balance that this strategy requires. It may divert energies from the issue of self-government, particularly in so far as it might involve active participation in the constitutional structure such as in the field of elections or as a pressure group to the extent that they may be absorbed into the prevailing polity. This was demonstrated by the JP movement's association with Janata, and also NBJK's involvement in the 1984 elections. Nevertheless, it is clear that any realistic strategy must take cognisance of the modern idiom if the forms of oppression that it represents are to be overcome. The essential factor seems to be that the voluntary organisations did not view conventional party politics as the means of transformation that Nehru envisaged. They saw a need for greater decentralisation, both economic and political, and their programmes represented an immediate movement in the direction of voluntarism, paving the way for a redefinition of the scope of politics.

This is not to say that voluntary organisations studied represented an alternative polity. The scope of their work was not clear, and their ideology and programmes were generally vague, with the direction of their work based on a strategy of trial and error. However, this allowed them the flexibility that they needed if they were to be concerned with the wholeness of social existence and the immediate needs of people. On the other hand, they operated only at the local level and did not project a macro-structure. Moreover as small local-level groups they were diffused, and confronted many problems such as isolation from other groups, difficulties in promoting an understanding of the linkages between micro and macro-structures, only reaching a limited number of people, lack of funds to undertake their work, hostility and even persecution by existing power structures both local and macro-levels.

Yet the significance of these organisations should not to be underestimated just because they were local and did not present an authoritative or definitive plan of an alternative. Their size afforded them an independence from government and bureaucratic constraints. This enabled them to: pave the ground for new ideas that the government may have been unwilling to try, as well as assume a more balanced perspective towards government policies; and thus serve as an essential link between the government and people. Moreover their vagueness reflected the belief that autonomous groups could work out their own solutions according to prevailing conditions. This included struggling at the micro-level for political and economic rights "of the poor in the teeth of determined opposition from the watchdogs of the established macro-structures".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> D L Sheth, "Grass-Roots Stirrings and the Future of Politics", *Alternatives*, IX (1983), p.15.

Furthermore, the connections between JP's ideas and the activities of these micro-organisations were clear. In so far as JP's understanding and vision was at a much broader level, his ideas make for a coherent framework in which the potential challenge offered by these organisations to the immediate situation can be appreciated. The scope of the voluntary organisations studied was limited by their fragmented nature and their need to develop a partnership on a macro-level as well as develop a comprehension about the current macro-structures. Nevertheless, the fact was that the existing political order has so far proved unable to fulfill the needs of most people. So long as people continue to have difficulty living with the existing governing order then JP or decentralised voluntary organisation-type processes, which confront the immediate issues that concern people, have both appeal and relevance.



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